

POPULAR NOVELS

BY

MARIA DARRINGTON-DESLONDE.

— 0 —

THE MILLER OF SILCOTT MILL.

JOHN MARIBEL.

— 0 —

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New York.

JOHN MARIBEL.

A NOVEL.

BY

MARIA DARRINGTON-DESLONDE,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MILLER OF SLOOTT HILL," ETC.

"I would go fifty miles on foot, for I have not a horse worth riding on, to kiss the hand of that man whose generous heart will give up the reins of his imagination into his author's hands, be pleased he knows not why and cares not wherefore."—STEELE.



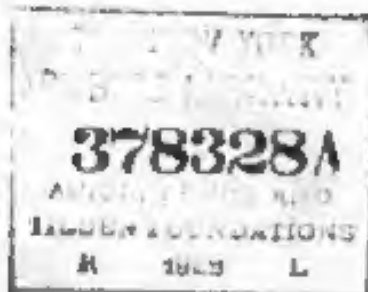
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IN
GRATEFUL RECOGNITION
OF A DISINTERESTED FRIENDSHIP,
I DESCRIBE THIS BOOK
TO
JAMES C. DERBY,
OF
New York.

Presented by the author

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DR. JOHN MARIBEL.

CHAPTER I.

HAST THOU NOT DROPPED FROM HEAVEN?

THE snow had been falling since three o'clock; and as night came on, a keen north wind set in, driving the frozen flakes into the faces of the passengers who rode outside on the coach, which made tri-weekly trips from S——, causing them to pull up the collars of their overcoats, and put an extra fold of comforter about their chins.

It was quite dark when the coach reached the rambling village, where the relay of fresh horses awaited them. Lights gleaming from the narrow windows of the inn were indeed a welcome sight to those who had been riding for hours in face of a biting wind, and it needed not the landlord's cheery invitation to induce them to warm and refresh themselves before proceeding on their dreary night journey.

It would have been difficult to find a more pleasant

place than the bar of the Red Tavern—thus was it popularly called, from the fact that Jerry Triggs, its proprietor, had, with questionable taste, painted it of a dull red color.

However uninviting the exterior, ample accommodation, cleanliness, and the realization of the promise of good cheer, which Jerry Triggs gave with beaming face and hearty earnestness, had made it a noted stopping place. For years he had driven a thriving business, and had now reached that period of substantial independence which secured for him the reputation of a solid man. This reputation went far towards the acquisition of popular favor, which expressed itself in a strong and increasing desire on the part of a goodly number of constituents to have him represent them in the next Congress. Triggs, however, understood somewhat the apocryphal character of popularity, and was wisely content to sit down under the tree of Liberty, and leave to others the perilous chance of climbing to its topmost branches. By this sound philosophy he escaped the hallucinations of ambition, and retained his property and good name.

Thus we see that Jerry Triggs was a man of some importance; and the reader will therefore excuse the slight delay caused by his introduction, while we lingered on the threshold of the warm, bright apartment where Mrs. Triggs, a handsome young woman, was dispensing cups of hot coffee to the impatient travellers.

During the bustle consequent upon serving so many cold and hungry people, Mr. Triggs had not noticed an addition to his guests; nor was it until he heard Mrs. Triggs exclaiming, "Bless me! is that you, Dr. John?" that he turned to greet a young man carrying in his arms a child, so enveloped in wrappings, that the end only of a little nose and a pair of luminous brown eyes could be seen.

He placed it on a chair close to the fire, and without appearing to observe the looks of curiosity and astonishment which he attracted, he proceeded to divest her—for the child was a girl—of her surplus clothing.

"Deary me! and it's a real beauty," cried Mrs. Triggs. "Where ever did you pick her up, Dr. John?"

He looked up smiling at her pretty face, but did not answer. He went on chafing the child's cold feet, covered with their thin cotton stockings, from which the toes were peeping. The little creature tossed back the golden curls, that, loosened from confinement, fell down her shoulders in a shining mass. What is prettier than this baby hair, like fine-spun gold, making an aureole around a cherub face?

She held out her dimpled hands towards the leaping blaze and said, with winning sweetness:

"Oo's dood, John; please give Kitty some bread and butter."

"That I will, little one," he answered, "and Mrs. Triggs will let us have some jam."

A lull had taken place in the clamorous uproar caused by the clinking of glasses and the clash of many voices, while all eyes were bent on the tiny bit of humanity seated in the great wooden chair, and the broad-shouldered young man ministering so tenderly to her. Having made her quite comfortable, he rose and said: "Good evening, gentlemen," in full, rich tones, and with a manner so unmistakably sincere and cordial, that there was but one opinion in all that company, and it was, that John Maribel was an excellent fellow, an "out and outer," Tim Perkins said, as he sipped his whiskey and water. Tim Perkins was the coachman, and also a personage of importance in the days of which we write.

In our intercourse with our fellow-men, there is no instrument of power more efficient than that of a really kind and genial nature. That it is too often displayed with grudging parsimony is a misfortune which experience leads us deeply to deplore. On this occasion it opened the way to an acquaintance between two men occupying different spheres in life: the one, a gentleman, in the fullest sense of the arbitrary meaning of the word; the other a journeyman carpenter, who stood watching the scene which was passing before him, the distinctive marks of his face sharpened into intense curiosity.

When little Kitty was in a fair way of enjoying her bread and jam, and her cheeks were being lavishly smeared with the sugared mixture, John Maribel felt him-

self at liberty to assuage the pangs of curiosity which kept Mrs. Triggs hovering about the child.

"What do you think of this real flesh and blood doll baby, Mrs. Triggs?" he said; most people get their gifts on Christmas morning, but you see that mine has come on Christmas eve."

"Dear me, sir," she answered, "how you always do go on; as if you want me to believe that she really and truly belongs to you!"

"I assure you that I have no reason to doubt my claim to her."

"Dr. John! I wonder at you. Who would have believed it of you?"

"What?" he asked, laughing.

"Oh, nothing at all," she answered, blushing and looking very pretty, "only folks have always held the best opinion of you, and——"

"My dear madam, pray believe that I have done nothing in this instance to forfeit the good opinion of any one. When I will have told you, on my honor, that my claim to the child is based entirely upon the authority of this scrap of paper, I feel convinced that I will retain your favor, which, I declare, I should be sorry to lose."

He drew from his pocket a folded slip of letter paper. "I found her sitting beside old Ethan Featherstone, this afternoon—or I should rather say evening, for it was late when I reached the house. The old man was dead, and

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the child was lying curled up in his great leathern chair, crying from cold and hunger. This curious bit of a letter was pinned to her frock. Evidently a woman's hand had arranged the shawl about her form, and placed the letter where it might be readily discovered."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Triggs approached eagerly to hear its contents, which were as follows:

"I know that you are coming, John Maribel. You have done your best to save my worthless life—save this child from the fate which must otherwise await her. I have perhaps studied overmuch the vices of men with systematic hatred, which has obscured my mental vision and rendered me, in a manner, insensible to the warm sympathies which emanate from a genial nature; but if I have hated vice, and, what is worse, the travesty of virtue, my embittered heart has yet the power of appreciating genuine honesty and uprightness, and of knowing a good man when I meet him. I die, believing that, in you, my confidence is not misplaced.

"ETHAN FEATHERSTONE.

"P.S.—Call the child Kitty."

"That is all," said John Maribel, refolding the scrap of paper. "I have brought Kitty here through the storm and darkness, and if she has anything to regret, she has certainly forgotten it in her enjoyment of bread and jam."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Triggs, "so old Featherstone is dead at last! A poor, pitiful, old skin flint! For the sake, however, of the handsome words he's left about you, I'm almost inclined to forgive the long score I've run up against him. I'll back them with my indorsement, and, by George! I know that every man in the country will do the same."

"Thank you, my good friend," answered John Maribel in a somewhat embarrassed tone, for the words of Mr. Triggs had drawn upon him the gaze of the travellers. "I fear," he added, "that my concern for the little girl has made me forgetful of poor old Featherstone, whose remains lie uncared for in the lonely house. Pray, see that some one be sent at once; and it would be well, also, to inform Mr. Sharpe, as there may be a will."

"It's my opinion," said Triggs, "based upon my knowledge of the man, that he was too mean ever to bring himself to parting with his money. He'd have made a compact with the devil himself, to keep anybody else from enjoying it. It may, in all probability, be found in a strong box under his bed."

"Trust me, Mr. Triggs, Mr. Featherstone has left no such convenient prey to the pilferer. Although he lived in open hostility to all the amenities of life; and though little solicitous about the good opinion of his fellow-men, he was a deep thinking man, of sound judgment in matters of business, and I warrant you he has committed no ab-

sturdily in the disposition of wealth, which I believe to be considerable."

"Time's up, gentlemen!" shouted the stentorian lungs of Tim Perkins. There was a scramble for hats and overcoats; and little Kitty was hastily enveloped in her wrappings and heartily kissed by good Mrs. Triggs, who surreptitiously conveyed to her, over John Maribel's shoulder, a paper of sweet cakes, for which she was rewarded by a delighted smile, and "Oo's dood too," from the rosebud mouth, half buried in the filmy scarf of knitted wool, which the kind woman had brought out from the treasures in her bureau drawer, to keep the little one warm during the journey.

The coach was unusually full, the inside places all taken, and when John Maribel stood by with his burthen, Tim Perkins shouted from his elevated seat: "There's no room made, Doctor. You'll have to get up here."

"No, he shall not," exclaimed a voice from the interior of the coach; and, at the same time, a young man in a rough overcoat sprang out and earnestly insisted that Dr. Maribel should take his place.

"You can't think of exposing the child, sir, on such a night as this."

"I am really very much obliged to you," exclaimed John, in a voice which testified in its earnest, hearty tones to his sense of the stranger's kindness. "Your name, if you please?"

"Perry Deane."

"All right!" and Tim Perkins cracked his whip clear and sharp; the horses snorted impatiently; the passengers settled themselves as comfortably as they might; then a plunge into the darkness, and the coach rumbled on towards its destination.

CHAPTER II.


"THERE IS A WRITTEN SCROLL."

FIFTEEN months before the opening of this story, a man in worn, shabby clothes, wearing an aspect of settled discontent upon his shrivelled face, with a manner directly opposed to that which Cicero terms *urbanitas*, stopped at the Red Tavern, and after spending two days in looking about, bargaining for a house, he at last fixed upon a lonely and dilapidated tenement, three miles away from the village, which from its bare and barren situation was called Stony-hill Farm. As to the farm, it required a good deal of credulity to believe that it ever had existed; for the land was worn into gullies, and was productive of nothing better than a crop of broom-sedge and a few stunted wild-pum trees.

Ethan Featherstone's morose silence seemed to indicate that he fully appreciated the hazardous faculty of speech. He invited no man's good-will, and repulsed the advances which, as a stranger coming to settle among them, the simple country folks were tempted to make.

He at once impressed them with the importance which attaches to every man who can pay promptly for what he wants. These wants, miserably meagre, were, however, so easily satisfied, that few were the better for his means of gratifying them. Upon taking possession of his house, he quickly placed the barrier of his uncourteous manners, and his biting cynicism, between himself and the outer world; and his unusual mode of life gave rise to a rumor, which soon settled down into an accepted fact, that Ethan Featherstone was that epitome of human meanness—a miser.

Shut out from all social sympathy, the old man dragged on the weary burden of days—heavy with the weight of monotonous misery—until at last his growing infirmities of body caused him to desire medical care, and the young negro, the only person admitted to his presence, was dispatched to the village with a letter for Dr. Maribel. The return coach brought "Dr. John," as the people soon learned to call the genial, kind-hearted young physician, whose visits ever afterwards were the signal for a perfect mob of anxious mothers, who came to consult him about their teething babies, and the rheumatics of their aged



relations. For nearly a year Dr. Maribel had stopped regularly at the Red Tavern, once, sometimes twice a month, and walked from there to Stony-bill, to visit Mr. Beutherstone. Through that time he had really learned very little about the old man, who kept up, during his brief visits, a determined silence, which he seldom broke, except to ask the unvarying question :

"How long will I last, John Maribel?"

The term of his existence was at last drawing to its close; shadows, darkening into deepest gloom, gathered about his solitary death-bed. Unloved, unwept, surrounded by the squalor of poverty, which was the more horrible because it was not forced upon him by the inevitable grip of want, he lay, waiting for the summons which he seemed to regard with stolid indifference.

The wind sighed and moaned around the old house, now loosening a shingle from the roof, and then swooping down the chimney, sending a cloud of soot and ashes into the room where the sick man lay. The snow had whitened the crest of the hill and covered the path which led to the house. A woman, carrying a child, came painfully breasting the storm, toiling slowly upwards, half blinded by the driving snow, and shivering as she drew the shawl about the child, leaving her own frail form to the sting of the merciless cold.

On reaching the house, and seeing the hall door ajar, she pushed it open, and holding the child by the hand,

moved noiselessly down the hall to the chamber where Ethian Featherstone awaited her. Entering, she seated the child before the smouldering fire, and then turned to meet the burning eyes of the old man. The ghost of a disagreeable smile made his face yet more ghastly as he said:

"So you have answered my summons."

"Yes, I have brought Kitty."

"Let me look at her," he said, with a look in his eyes which might have been a shadow from the far past, for it changed his face.

The soul so long imprisoned in its hard case of cynical misanthropy was struggling to assert its divine essence. Innocence, the touchstone of human sympathy, struck upon the chord which vibrates in soft cadences, reaching far down into the heart, and awakening tender memories.

The child was lifted to the side of his bed, and under the influence of softening emotion, he said: "I would bless you, little Kitty, but my blessing might turn into a curse." He placed his bony hand upon the golden head, and then drew it back somewhat impatiently, saying: "Take her away; it is too late now to wish that I had taught her to love me."

Kitty was again settled near the fire, and the woman went back to the side of the dying man. He was breathing painfully. She made a movement to raise him, which he scornfully repulsed.

"Stand there, and listen," he said, speaking slowly and catching his breath, while the old, hard look came back into his face. "It is coming fast enough, Frances Featherstone; my time is growing fearfully short. The summing up of your offences against me and mine might arouse the slumbering passion which has consumed away my life, and might now hasten its departure. I will have discharged my debt to you when you know my firm and unalterable will with regard to the child. The actions of Providence are mysterious beyond our ken, and mercy is one of its most valuable ministrants. In examining, as I have done, the motives which influence my actions, I have no hesitation in attributing them to what I consider a sense of justice. Hate, perhaps, has tyrannized over my judgment—so be it. I leave to Providence the exercise of mercy. My mind has too long habituated itself to the contemplation of my wrongs to swerve now from the execution of an inexorable decision. I know that a man hazards much when he attempts to compass the infinite by the finite; but I have dared to attempt the direction of a human life—to assume the responsibility of the governing influences which are to turn it to good or to evil."

He paused; his voice had sunk so low that Frances Featherstone could scarcely hear his words. After a silence of several minutes he bade her bring the Bible from the table. She moved at his command, as though under some fell influence, mechanically placing her hand upon

the boy volume, and saying in a hollow voice—for she divined his purpose—"I am ready."

"Repeat after me: 'I swear, as I hope for God's mercy, that I will abide by the conditions of Etham Featherstone's will. I swear, from this night, to renounce all claim to Catherine, the lawful heir of Oscar Featherstone.'"

A low cry burst from her lips. "Oh!" she moaned, "is this your revenge?"

"Refuse," the old man said, "and the child goes from here a beggar like yourself."

The colorless face seemed to grow more livid in its sharp agony as she murmured; "I consent."

"Now read this," he said, drawing a folded document from beneath his pillow. "It is a copy of my will. It is well that you should acquaint yourself with its contents. Read, so that I may not lose a word."

In low, quivering tones she commenced.

"Louder," he whispered hoarsely. "Your voice was not wont to tremble thus."

She gave him one flashing glance, while the flush of anger mounted to her cheek; but some powerful motive moved her to obedience, and she recommenced, this time in a clear, distinct voice:

"This is my last will and testament. I name, appoint, and constitute James McStebbins the executor of my estate. After the payment of all my just debts, I direct my executor to take charge and possession of all my

property, real and personal, and to hold the same in trust for the benefit of Catherine Featherstone, now aged three years. When said Catherine shall have reached the age of twenty-one years, I hereby direct Janus McStebbins, my executor, to deliver over to the said Catherine Featherstone the property of which I am possessed, together with all the increase which she I have accumulated from the period of my death to the period of the transfer, thereby constituting her my sole and universal heir, under and upon the following conditions:

"The conditions upon which I above bequeath all of my estate to Catherine Featherstone are, that she shall immediately, upon my death, be removed from the custody of her mother, and that no intercourse or correspondence shall exist between the said Catherine Featherstone and her mother, at any time or under any circumstances, until she shall have attained her twenty-first year.

"During the minority of the said Catherine Featherstone, I direct my executor to provide for her subsistence at the rate of \$30 (thirty dollars) monthly, to be delivered to such protectors as she may have, without disclosing her origin, or the source whence come these provisions.

"Should, however, these conditions not have been observed, and Catherine have held communication and intercourse with her mother, and have been under her protection, guidance, and advice, then I revoke all bequests and

dispositions in her behalf, and I designate and make my nephew, Gaston de Ferricre, the son of my sister, Agnes Featherstone, by her lawful husband, Charles Alphonso de Ferricre, my sole and universal heir; and I direct my executor to turn over and convey to him all my estate, charging him, however, with an annuity in favor of Catherine Featherstone of \$500 (five hundred dollars) during the term of her natural life."

"Stop," said the old man, "the rest does not concern you. Bring the ink and paper from yonder table. Write, as I dictate."

She wrote, without remonstrance, the note which John Maribol found pinned to Kitty's dress.

Kitty had fallen asleep by the fire, her rosy lips apart, the flush of sleep on her cheeks. Her head had dropped sideways, and the little rosy hands lay on her lap. Oh! what a picture to contemplate! Frances Featherstone stood looking at her, and the old man from the bed lay looking at the two. Once, the woman turned an entreating glance towards him, but she withdrew it with a despairing sigh.

"Why do you linger?" he said; "you must not be found here."

She raised the sleeping child in her arms, pressing her with a passionate movement to her bosom, and then placed her in a chair beside the bed. Kitty gave a contented sigh as her head sunk upon the arm of the chair.

Exhausted by the long journey, the child slept, all unconscious of her mother's martyrdom.

Frances knelt for a moment beside the child, her whole soul seeming to go forth to her as she covered her with that look of ineffable tenderness which wells from a mother's heart. Then rising, with a wild agony in her face, and without hazarding another look, she left the room. This woman, in the supreme moment of decision, had reached a point of heroism which exalted her to a standard of virtue strongly in contradiction to her past, and perhaps ineffectual in its influence upon her future; yet, for the moment, the one pure sentiment of her heart—her love for her child—was the incentive which moved her to a sacrifice that embodied a total renunciation of those ties, the severance of which cost so terrible a pang to a mother's heart.

There are many crownless martyrs—unrecorded saints—heroic acts of self-abnegation that in many instances are only known by the higher Power which inspires them. They are none the less grand—none the less worthy of immortality.

CHAPTER III.

"I WILL BE WELCOME THEN?"

DURING the ride of twenty miles John Marbel had ample time to cast about in his mind for some plan by which his new charge might receive the care which her tender age required. As he folded the little soft thing in his strong arms, a great tenderness went out towards her. She seemed so greatly to be pitted in her infantine forlornness! Each time that the sweet lips were held up for a kiss, another link was forged in the chain of his bondage. A great heart is so quick to yield to helplessness!

Children experience readily the *sympathie* which exists between their co-suffering trust and the sympathy which we owe it. Kitty's often repeated "Oo's dood, John," was but the manifestation of her satisfaction in her new friend, greatly enhanced by her enjoyment of Mrs. Tigges's sweet cakes. In all probability, the sweet cakes caused the predominant feeling. Is it not a little shocking to the finer sensibilities when we see that the principle of Faith in human love is mainly created by the power which seduces that love to gratify the senses?

The increasing inclemency of the weather, and the lateness of the hour when the coach reached the town, induced John Maribel to put it to instantaneous execution a plan which, at that trying moment, offered itself as the only solution of a difficulty, which was every instant growing more serious. Calling a cab, he directed the driver to take him to Samuel Pitkin's, 140 Broad street.

An exclamation of delight burst from Kitty when she found herself before a brilliantly-lighted window, where Christmas good things were piled in bowdlering abundance, and surmounted by a figure of Santa Claus with a sprig of holly in his hand. In the midst of the tempting display a highly-illuminated card informed the public that Samuel Pitkin wished them a happy Christmas, and invited them to go within, where they would find the means of spending it merrily, at the least possible expense. John Maribel smiled as his eye fell upon Samuel Pitkin's card. It was a simple device to attract the passer-by; but John Maribel knew that Samuel Pitkin would amply fulfil the promise held out, both as to quality and weight. When Kitty had looked until her little heart was ready to burst with covetousness, John took her in his arms, and opening the glass door entered the shop. Mr. Pitkin was in the act of weighing out a pound of candied citron when he espied Dr. Maribel. Wiping his hands, he came from behind the counter with an expression of questioning curiosity upon his face.

"Eh! Doctor," he cried; "what's this you've brought us?" It's Christmas time, and most people are looking for surprises; but, upon my word, I didn't expect to see you coming here with a——. I declare, if it isn't a little girl!"

Now John Maribel was in his heart sincerely relieved to find that Mr. Pitkin was inclined to take his coming with the child so good-naturedly, and, indulging his humor, he said:

"May I take her in by the fire, Mr. Pitkin? She is tired from her long journey."

They passed into the little parlor, all aglow with light from the roaring fire, and brilliant with Christmas holly. A comfortable, motherly-looking little woman, in the whitest of caps, sat knitting on one side of the fireplace. She rose at sight of John Maribel, and so great was her astonishment as her eyes fell upon the pretty little creature whom he carried in his arms, that her knitting dropped from her hands, the ball of yarn rolling into the fire.

"Why, Dr. John, who's this you've brought to us? Oh! my heart! the pretty, pretty angel!" she exclaimed, as Dr. Maribel released Kitty's curls from the no string confetter. "Oh, the deary dear!" And she took the child to her motherly bosom, and covered her with kisses.

"Oo's deary too," lisped Kitty, setting the kind woman off again into paroxysms of admiration.

Mr. Pitkin looked on with a puzzled face. He under-

stood nothing about it, and was each moment becoming more bewildered. John Maribel thought it time to explain; so he told the good couple all that he knew about the child. He had thought of Mrs. Pitkin as the person most likely to assume the charge of the child, without stinting her of love, the thing which children most thrive upon. Kitty might, in time, make up to them for all that they had lost, and—John suddenly paused in painful confusion—utterly amazed at the result of his words, for Mrs. Pitkin had rushed to the arms of her husband, and was saying, between sobbing and weeping:

"It's pretty Martha come back to us, Susan! I know you're a little near; but it's no use saying when you've none of your own to leave it to."

"It's Christmas eve, Susan," answered Mr. Pitkin. "'Peace on earth, and good will to men.' For little Martha's sake," and a tear trembled in his eye, "we will keep the child."

"Pray allow me to explain," said John Maribel, who had again taken the child in his arms, for her little face was white and quivering. "I fear that I have managed but awkwardly, if you understand that in bringing this child to you I yid all responsibility for her. On the contrary, I claim my share in her maintenance. You, dear Mrs. Pitkin, can do much more for her—you can give her a mother's love and care."

Mr. Pitkin, it must be confessed, was strongly biased by

what Mrs. Pitkin termed "necessity;" and we all know how quickly conscience, which usually prompts us to do right, accommodates itself to the impulse which urges us to do wrong. He had but a moment before pronounced the words of the angelic chorus, which, on that memorable night of a Saviour's advent, burst upon the Jewish shepherds in glorious harmony, "Peace on earth, and good will to men." Samuel Pitkin's good will never overstepped the barrier of his ruling motive; and being really sincere in his desire to do right, but obstinately averse from parting with his money, he accommodated his charity to suit the suggestions of a conscience which had suffered hard usage, but still attempted to perform its duty in the way of admonitions, which were sometimes grudgingly obeyed. On this occasion he must have experienced a sharper reminder than usual; for though at heart glad to know that Dr. Maribel would do his part, and he knew that it would be a generous one—he said, "She is a little thing yet; and mother and I won't grumble about the bit she will eat. I might be better off, but I don't complain."

"Oh, Samuel!" cried Mrs. Pitkin, "to hear you talk, one might think that you had squandered your savings, when you've got a pretty sum laid by."

"That's neither here nor there, mother. Give the child her tea, and I'll bring down the little bed."

John Maribel, being anxious to get home, saw with

satisfaction that Kitty's welcome was assured. Promising to return on the morrow, he kissed the child, who strongly protested against his departure, and would be consoled only when Mr. Pitkin took her into the shop, and from the depths of a glass jar drew out a stick of bright candy.

On opening the door leading into the street, John Maribel met face to face his travelling companion, Perry Deane, the young man who had given up his place in the coach to him.

"This is indeed a piece of good fortune!" he exclaimed, stepping back into the shop. "Allow me to thank you again, Mr. Deane, for your generous conduct to little Kitty, and to ask you to do me the favor to call at my office at your earliest convenience."

"I am much obliged to you, sir; but, really, I am but an humble journeyman carpenter;" and Perry said it as though he was proud of not being assumed to own it.

A pair of honest eyes are a wondrous advantage to a man; and when John Maribel held out his hand, and said: "I am heartily glad to know you," looking straight at Perry Deane, the young carpenter gave back too friendly a look, yielding at once to the potent influence.

The disparities of birth and position were swept away by a manner which seemed to take sweetness from the ananias of the heart. The delicate tact of a well-bred

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man had overcome the proud shyness of the young carpenter; and Perry gave the required promise, as John Maribel, again shaking hands, went out into the street.

CHAPTER IV.

"OH, WHAT A SYMPATHY OF WOE IS THIS!"

WHEN Perry entered the parlor, he found it empty; the bedroom door being ajar, he ventured to look in. What was his surprise to see the old couple standing together, their heads bowed over an old-fashioned daguerreotype case, which Mrs. Pitkin had, shifting the position from time to time in order to get a better view of the treacherous image, while Mr. Pitkin was actually wiping his eyes with his red silk handkerchief.

"You remember that little frock, Samuel," said Mrs. Pitkin; "how I worked evenings, a tucking and tucking, until my eyes was nearly out, so fine was they, an' I regular to a thread; and you bought the bit of ribbon to tie up the sleeves, and pa, he gave her the little red shoes, and proud was we when we all went off together, you carrying Martha, and had her picture taken. Do you see any like-

ness, Samuel, between the two? No, I'm afraid there isn't. Martha's hair was dark, and her skin was not so fair; but children is children; their sweet ways is all the same, and may be, when God takes one away, he makes a place for another."

Perry's eyes had wandered from the old people to the child, who lay in the little bed which had been brought from the garret, where it had stood tenantless for so many years. She was curled up in her soft nest, her hair covering the pillow, and contrasting in its golden tint with the long eyelashes that shadowed her cheeks, flushed into a delicate rose hue, like the lining of a sea-shell. The parted lips showed the small, regular teeth; and one dimpled hand rested on the coverlet. Perry turned again to look at the two old faces, transformed by the magic of parental love; touching in their grief; softened into actual comeliness by the recollection of those few brief years when little Martha was their own; drawn into closer sympathy over the blurred picture, and trying to believe that their old hearts could take in another love—that the child so strangely committed to their care would fill the place of the lost one.

"Ah, Samuel!" Mrs. Picken said, shutting the cover of the daguerreotype, "this one was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

Simple words, which exhaust all that we could say of that love, so nearly perfect—so nearly divine, which

lives in a mother's heart. Perry went softly back to the fire, and seated himself in his accustomed place. He felt guilty, as though he had violated the sanctuary of their inner lives. Hitherto, he had thought old Pitkin's soul no larger than one of his nutmegs, and his heart as incapable of any gentle emotion; and here he was crying over a baby's picture. Mother Pitkin had risen into the dignity of a sorrowing Rachel. Her round face was no longer meaningless to Perry, and when she came into the room, he took her hand, and said quite gently:

"Mother, I'm glad to be here to-night. May God send you many a happy Christmas eve, and happier Christmas mornings." The timbre of his voice struck strangely upon his own ear, for his words were a newer approach to sentiment than he was accustomed to make; and he shrunk away in confusion from the tearful old face, now turned up towards him—near enough to have received the kiss which he was half-tempted to give. Instead, he put his hand into his pocket and drew out a soft package, which he opened.

"I heard you say that you would like to have some country-spun wool, such as you used to knit with in your young days. While I was up at Mapleton I got this for you."

"The very thing I was wishing for to-night! Samuel, he likes knitted socks; and bought yarn don't seem to last

like that you get squashed by the country folks. It takes you, Perry, to humor an old woman."

In the mean time Mr. Pitkin had set out lemons and sugar and a decanter of whiskey. The old man was famous at mixing punch; to night, of all nights, he taxed it with care, measuring out the ingredients, and stirring until Perry thought that he would never have finished. And there was the cold chicken pie, its raised crust lying so temptingly near the knife which Mrs. Pitkin had laid on the top of it. At last they drew up around the table, Mrs. Pitkin first going in to take a look at Kitty. While Perry is eating his pie, Mrs. Pitkin looks on with smiling satisfaction. She was proud of her pastry, and secretly glowed in Perry's appetite, perverting the art of cookery to a flat cry of his palate, when it might have jeopardized his digestive apparatus, had it not been under the control of a perfect physical organization. As it was, Perry's appetite was a standing joke; and to look at him, tall and broad and strong, one could connect no idea of pain or sickness with the vigor of his young life. The monthly stipend which he paid for board and lodging was scarcely equivalent to what he received. The old couple had grown to like him cordially, and in a great measure to depend upon him for counsel, trusting to his common sense view of things, which seldom led him into error. Perry's opinions were based upon a practical working out of their results. He seldom hit a nail on the head without driving

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it solidly into the heart of the wood; and he had hammered out a good many ideas from the hard routine of a workman's life. From his own standpoint he looked upon his trade as being the very best in the world, and he considered industry and honesty the best weapons with which to fight off the disadvantages of poverty and want of education. His code of morals was simple enough. With him, right was right, and his proud, honest egotism had a hearty dislike to whatever interfered with his credit and respectability. Mrs. Pitkin was wont to say that Perry was a "likely young man." Translated into more elegant phraseology, he was a handsome man. His well-defined features, not wanting in regularity, were set off by a luxuriant beard and a close-curling crop of black hair; and he had a direct way of looking at people whom he addressed, as if he was giving them the fullest opportunity of reading into the depths of his soul, while, all unconsciously, he was exerting a certain power, generally a conciliatory one, which, being characteristically calm, lent him a dignity that raised him at once to that importance which imperceptibly clings to a man whose individuality needs no props—no accidental influence, and stands out boldly asserting itself. As the son of Peleus had a vulnerable heel, owing to the carelessness of Thetis, so Nature has been scarcely less blamable; for while she endows her children with qualities calculated to protect them from danger, she frequently leaves some vulnerable weak-

ness which often upsets the whole moral harmony of a character.

Unhappily for Perry Deane, he possessed this weakness in the shape of pride, which narrowed his mental vision; and, as in optics, we see everything by means of the rays of light which proceed from it, so Perry was apt to allow himself to be biased by influences emanating from this pride. He knew that it was only upon the assessment of his personal merit that he was to be valued; and his proud, sensitive nature was covetous of that approbation which depends so completely upon that merit. He had a bold, not to say presumptuous, reliance upon himself. From his earliest years this reliance had proved his best friend. During his feverish childhood he had learned to estimate the slim chances of the world's sympathetic aid, and he was little inclined now to lean upon any manifestation of it. So, as he rose from the table, he said to Mrs. Pitkin:

"I'm half sorry that I promised to go to Dr. Maribel. I can't see that we've got anything in common, or that he has any cause to feel bound to continue our acquaintance."

"There it is again, Perry!" replied Mr. Pitkin. "You never know when a man means well by you. Take my word for it, John Maribel will be glad to see you."

"As if Perry wasn't as good as the best," put in Mrs. Pitkin.

"Thank you, mother," answered Perry, smiling. "I

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am sure, if your good opinion could help me, I would be as 'good as the best;' but, unfortunately, I am not, in one sense of the word. I am not a gentleman, as the world goes; and a carpenter has no business patting himself in the way of getting floored for being out of his place."

"Dear me! but you've a masterful spirit, Perry. Just you take my advice, and go and see Dr. Maribel quite natural like. I'll brush your best coat; and there's your new shirt, as stiff as starch can make it; and the red cravat that sets you off so nicely, and——"

"Stop, mother" cried Perry. "You don't suppose that I'm going dressed up in my best clothes to see Dr. Maribel? Can't you see that I'd be trying to ape the gentleman? No; I go as the carpenter, Perry Deane, or not at all."

"You're right there," said Mr. Pitkin, putting down the candle which he had taken up preparatory to going to bed. "You're right, Perry; every man is entitled to be judged for himself, and I, for one, don't believe in making pretensions. Pretensions sit on a man like a badly fitting coat. I only say that I don't know any one who can hold his own better than you; and you'll be standing in your own light if you don't accept what a man, as honest as yourself, offers you."

"Well," answered Perry, "I'll see about it in the morning. Good-night; I shall be off to the shop by day-

light. Mr. Graham is sure to be there waiting for me. You needn't put up anything for me, mother. I'll be back to breakfast."

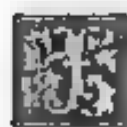
Kitty slept on. The rain died away in the street. The clock went tick, tick, tick, tick, and the sleet pelted against the windows. Honest Pitkin was dreaming, perchance, of his Christmas customers, and heard not the stealthy step, the creaking sound of an opening door, close to his unconscious head. He slept on, unwaking by the closing again of the door, or the apparition of Mrs. Pitkin carrying in her arms a doll's cradle, which she placed close beside Kitty's bed.

"There," she murmured, "Santa Claus has come for you, little one. It was my Martha's—the doll and all."

Tenderly she smoothed the bit of fine blue silk that covered the doll, and a tear-drop fell upon it. She did not heed it, but it was gathered by the recording angel and carried where the treasures of human love are garnered for eternity.

CHAPTER. V.

"TOO GENTLE AND TOO FREE A MAN."



MR. MARIBEL'S office was a snug little room, on the ground floor of the house in which he lived. Back of the office was a waiting-room for patients, and from ten to twelve P.M. it was generally

occupied by that class who draw largely upon a young physician's time and patience, and yield but little increase to his income. Besides the house, he possessed nothing but his profession; and as yet this barely sufficed for his maintenance, and that of an invalid aunt, his sole surviving relative.

This old aunt was now sitting by the parlor fire upstairs, enveloped in a long black cloak, and raising her thin wizened face every now and then to look at the mantel-clock. It was on the stroke of nine before John Mandel made his appearance. The furniture of the room was old and threadbare; the hard-backed chairs stood grinning against the walls, and the old lady looked as if she had crept out of the past, of which everything in the room seemed to be a relic, except the young man who stood on the hearth rug—his feet wide apart, and his back to the fire. This young man was pleasant to look at. Though no Apollo, he did look as though Earth might have smiled at his birth. His face, in which no one feature was remarkable, except, perhaps, his blue eyes, was characterized by its look of open, genial honesty, and by the play of his flexible mouth, which formed itself so readily into a smile, brightening it into an attractiveness that won for him, wherever he was known, the popularity which attaches itself to a man who is universally conceded to be a "good fellow." Not a good-for-nothing "good fellow"—a pleasant, unprincipled care-for-naught; but a

thoroughly honest, large-hearted man, a little careless of his own interest, but delicately sensitive to those of his fellow-men.

He had a habit of passing his fingers through his blond hair, which curled closely to his head; and he stood now looking at Arnt Parrott as though he were puzzled over the palpable paradox of wishing a merry Christmas to the vinegar-faced old lady.

"I am really sorry to have kept you waiting, aunt," he said; "but really I was quite used up last night. I won't have to go up to Stony Hill again. The old man is dead, and I'm glad——"

"What, John! glad! You do not mean to say that you are glad that the man is dead?"

"Well, not exactly, aunt. I only mean, that going up there was a bore; and I would much rather find a paying patient at home."

"Paying patient! Indeed, you might well wish for one."

"Unfortunately, wishing is a very idle business," laughed John. "In spite of the hard times, I have brought you a Christmas present." He drew from his pocket a morocco case containing a pair of gold spectacles, and laid it on her lap. "You've worn your steel ones long enough."

She took the spectacles from the case, and balanced them for a moment in her small, thin hand, as if she were

weighing them, and estimating their value; then, looking up at him, she said:

"Gold spectacles, John Maribel! Is this the use to which you put old Featherstone's money?"

The ungracious reception of his gift seemed rather to amuse John than to cause him any annoyance; for he laughingly rejoined:

"Come, aunt, put them on your nose. A very small portion of old Featherstone's money went in the purchase; and I promise you that you shall not want sugar for your tea in consequence of my extravagance. Ah! here's Nellie with the tea-kettle. I never was more hungry in my life!"

He wheeled the old lady up to the table; for, in consequence of a fall, she had not walked for years; and old, ugly, fretful, and seemingly ungrateful, Aunt Parrott was the recipient of a tenderness almost womanly in its sympathy—a courtesy, emanating from a strong, manly heart, which yielded a reverent humility to her age and infirmity, showing itself in attention to her bodily wants, not in the indulgence of her thousand caprices. John Maribel could never have been seen to greater advantage than in contrast with the old woman who made him *vis-à-vis* at table. Perhaps all the sunshine of her life beamed upon her from his face. She softened under its influence. No one knew this better than Nellie Shea, the much-tried and sole domestic of the establishment, who was apt

to wait for Dr. John's presence before preferring a request.

Nellie had learned by sad experience to look out for the traps which were artfully set for her, and which more than once had sprung upon her unwary steps. Candles, and sugar, and port wine, were supposed by Mrs. Parrott to be objects of peculiar temptation to the girl; and vanity and love of "followers" her crowning weaknesses.

On this occasion Nellie had smartened her usually plain attire by a flaming ribbon, which, with utter disregard of combination, she had tied about her hair.

John Maribel smiled as he noticed the ill-chosen ornament; but Mrs. Parrott was absolutely speechless. She swallowed a mouthful of toast, the while scanning Nellie with her keen, black eyes.

"Take care, Nellie Shrew," she said, "your head is most alarmingly suggestive of inflammability."

"Please, ma'am," answered Nellie, quailing under the sarcasm, "I got it as near of a color as I could, that you mightn't notice I had it on."

John Maribel broke into a hearty laugh; and Nellie, under cover of it, escaped from her inquisitor.

She reappeared in a few moments to say that Dr. John was wanted in the office.

He wheeled Mrs. Parrott back to her place beside the fire; the table containing her books and papers was drawn up close to her side, and with a tender tone in his deep

voice, John said: "Now, aunt, try the new glasses. I wish I could stay with you a little longer this morning; but perhaps this is the paying patient, and we must not neglect him."

"Oh, John! If I could but shake off but one seven years from these old arms and legs, by the good Gods I'd go with you. Pray smooth down your hair, and look like what you really are—a skilful physician."

"I'm sure that I am very grateful and proud of your good opinion, aunt. I shall be punctual to dinner."

CHAPTER VI.

"GUESS AT HER YEARS, I PR'YTHEE."

IT was a hard blow to the young fellow when he knew that at the outset of his career he was to be shackled by the multifarious cares that come with responsibility unaided by independence. Fortunately for him, a strong, hopeful nature predominated over natural discouragement; so that when he received a letter from a New York lawyer informing him that an unknown aunt, destitute and an invalid, appealed to him for succor,

he set out at once, consciously convinced that he was performing only a simple duty.

Youth is naturally antagonistic to the selfish exactions of age; and John Maribel's life might have been embittered had he not possessed, in its outset, faith in a goal not yet proved by experience—that of working out his own life to a result, which, puzzling as it might be, yet grew plainer day by day, by the exercise of persevering reliance on the fortuitous concurrence of those atoms of circumstance that often make up the whole of success. Intellect possesses instincts which urge it, to cut loose from the leading strings of reason, and some of its most brilliant achievements have been accomplished without the aid of this timorous adviser.

John Maribel was not wont to appeal to her. The warm impulses of his heart rebelled against her prudent suggestions, and it may be fairly alleged against him that he trusted greatly to the charm of his manner, which, in its winning affability, drew out the kindness which lurks in every human heart, needing only the magic of tone and look to kindle it into active sympathy. No one spoke of John Maribel as a handsome man, but every face grew brighter in his presence, every care seemed lighter under the honest, hearty kindness, which perhaps with him was constitutional, but none the less effective.

He was peculiarly *sympathic*, and even Mrs. Parrott

melted towards him, when to all the world besides she seemed utterly shut out from those gentler emotions which we suppose conjoined to goodness. It is quite possible, in the perpetual ebb and flow of human life, to come across one completely hidden from our understanding, utterly unreadable from our point of view. The lonely old woman, shut up in John Maribel's house, had determinedly turned her back upon all social amenities, and presented the aspect of withered, shrunken humanity, embittered by long buffeting, by misfortunes of which she never spoke, and which seemed to have turned all the sweetness of her life into the acid of vinegar. Completely out of harmony with the uncouth exterior was the vivid, restless mind, which lived upon the very best of intellectual food. She devoured books, and, when she chose, she could talk well about them, but it was not often her whim to do so. She would sometimes pounce upon John with a date or a quotation—which was as likely to be in German or Italian as in English—and take him up roundly on his classics; and on occasion the old lady would deal out an epigrammatic sentence which not only set his teeth on edge. John's frank, warm nature sheltered him, however, from much truculent attack, and drew from her almost a reverence for those qualities which were strongly in contrast with her own. She was persistently silent on the subject of her private life, and John Maribel had long ceased to question her, or evince any

curiosity to know more about her than she was willing to reveal.

Nellie Shea had, contrary to all expectation, remained in Mrs. Parrott's service and performed for her the offices which her helpless condition demanded. The truth was that the constant companionship of the old woman had grown familiar to the girl, and she had found out that, among the nettles which Mrs. Parrott cultivated, was a fair flower which bloomed and gave its fragrance, choked as it was by the ranker weeds. It had flourished all unsuspected, until one night Nellie discovered its existence.

It was on the night before—Christmas eve. Mrs. Parrott was waiting for John, and Nellie, curled up in a corner of the fireplace, had fallen into a light sleep. A movement—a crackling of paper, and she became conscious that her mistress was reading a letter. She saw the old face shadowed into the softness of grief, the hard eyes looking tenderly upon the written characters, and when the trembling hands which held the paper fell upon her lap, still firmly clasping it, a convulsive spasm passed over her face, and tears, actual tears, streamed down her furrowed cheeks. It lasted but a moment; a rigid calm succeeded the unwanted agitation, the letter was slowly folded and put into her pocket, and she resumed her reading. She seemed in a moment wrapt in the mysticism which symbolizes the characters so expensively drawn in Hawthorne's "Transformation," but when at last she

laid the book on the table, she called to Nellie with a voice from which all the tartness seemed gone, and, drawing a silver coin from her purse, said, "Nellie, buy yourself a pair of stockings."

With laudable alacrity Nellie went out on the following morning, as soon as the shutters were taken down from the thread-and-needle store around the corner. The flaming ribbon was temptingly displayed in the show case. She really meant to buy the stockings, for her own were sadly out at heel, but temptation captured her, as it has many a wiser person, and so Aunt Parrott's money went for the ill-judged livery; and she knew it quite well, when she withered Nellie at the breakfast table.

CHAPTER VII.

"SIR, IT IS A MYSTERY."

PERRY DEANE came forward when John Marshall entered the office, extending his hand with a manner somewhat reserved, which, however, changed at once into easy cordiality under the genial warmth of the welcome which John gave him.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Deane. I take it exceedingly kind of you to have come this morning."

"Really, Doctor, I can't say that you have anything to thank me for. You know that to-day is a holiday; and to-morrow my time belongs to Mr. Graham."

"None of us are free, for that matter," answered John Maribel. "Every man is more or less a slave to money-getting, and young men like you and me have first to look to that before we can strike out in an independent way."

"There's a difference," said Perry, "a vast difference, in the way of getting it. You, for instance, exercise your own faculties uncontrolled, while I am paid so much per day to go by rule and measure. My work is set out for me. You are not excluded from a fair field of action, and —"

"Ah!" laughed John, "my field of action is anything but a fair one, my good fellow, and most distressingly narrow. I do not envy you the active exercise of your muscles; it is an excellent way to work off an exuberance of impatient ambition."

Perry looked at the bright young fellow with a dubious smile. It seemed so hard to connect John Maribel with anything so unlovely as that scrambling life of larval life that was so nearly linked to his own. There are some things that are as quickly comprehended by men of plain sense as by the most meditative scholar; and Perry Deane saw at once that besides the accident of birth, and the greater advantage of education, there existed no real barrier to his intercourse with John Maribel; that, indeed, there was a strong affinity between himself and this young man — an af-

finity of common interest—a kind ip of faculties, the exercise of which were perhaps their only weapons against the by- and-by difficulties that were sure to rise up to bar their way. It was hardly possible that an Iolaus would be found to smooth it for them.

They talked for a half-hour, and then the patients commenced dropping in. Even Christmas does not spare the pains of rheumatism, or relieve teething babies of their ailments. So John Maribel and Perry parted; not, however, without a promise from the latter that he would come again.

The young physician had gone through the routine of prescription with patient earnestness; and as a sugar-coating to the nauseous doses prescribed, he threw in a jest here, a smile there, and much comfort in the way of pleasant words. No one went away unsatisfied; no one felt quite so ill or so hopeless after seeing John Maribel.

He stood now passing his hands through his hair with just a shadow of gravity upon his face. He was poorer—poorer to-day than ever, for he had lent Dick Perley ten dollars. How could he have refused so small a favor? "And there was Kitty! Aunt Parrott would be horrified at this new extravagance; but, indeed, it couldn't be helped; it was an involuntary charge, but none the less sacred; *non*!"—John smiled and gave his hair another thrust—"she is the sweetest angel! It would take so little to buy her gown—and then there would be no doctor's bills; and

the old overcoat would hold out for the winter, with a new lining, and perhaps the rich patient would make his appearance, and"—the wish gave birth to a possibility—"old Mr. Irby might step on his marble door-steps, and—good gracious! what a wretch am I!" he exclaimed aloud.

"That I deny, Doctor," said a dapper little man, for whom Nellie held open the door. "You are neither morally nor physiologically correct. I never saw a man look less like a wretch than you do at this moment."

Dr. Maribel blushed a good deal as he shook hands with Mr. McStebbins, banker. His acquaintance with this gentleman was slight, very slight, indeed; and he was not a little puzzled to know what brought him to his office. Certainly no one could look less like a patient than did Mr. McStebbins. He seemed to bear about his elegant, not to say dainty person, an aroma of affluence and health which accorded but little with the shabbiness of the surroundings. When he had laid off his overcoat and drawn his gloves from his delicate hands, he seated himself in the only comfortable chair, and then addressed John Maribel:

"A case of idiosyncratic greenness—an eccentric old fool! I mean," seeing a look of bewilderment on John's face, "that you are well rid of old Fraherstone's humors."

"I don't see that," replied John, bluntly. "In getting rid of his humors I also get rid of his dollars; and it is not hard to see," looking around, "that I stand in need of them."

"You are still young, Dr. Maribel, and can afford to wait. Excuse any reference to myself, but I may say that at your age my prospects were not more brilliant than are yours; yet I flatter myself that fortune has accorded me a fair place in her temple; but to business."

John Maribel gave his hair another thrust, and looked expectantly at the speaker. Business had a most promising sound.

"I have received instructions," continued Mr. McStebbins, "to pay you a monthly allowance of thirty dollars for the support of the clerk called Kitty, who has, I think, been put upon you in a most unwarrantable manner. This allowance is to continue until she reaches her majority. I ante mystery, Dr. Maribel, but I believe that I must excuse myself from answering the questions which it would be perfectly natural for you to ask. When I will have handed you this, my instructions will be carried out to the letter."

He gave John a folded paper, something so suspiciously like a check, that the blood tingled to the end of his fingers; nor was he mistaken. It was a check for two hundred and fifty dollars.

"Really, I am quite in the dark!" he exclaimed, his hand going up to his head.

"It is yours, Dr. Maribel; a miserable bequest from a man who might have made you independent without marrying the large fortune which he has left behind him.

It comes, however, very appropriately on Christmas morning; and, upon my word, I believe that some genuinely good motive induced old Featherstone to give it to you. Permit me to offer you my sincere good wishes, and to say good morning to you."

He bowed himself out, leaving John with an expression of bewilderment on his face, which was bordering on the ludicrous. He started after the little man, too late, however, to redeem his manners, for he was just driving off in his coupé. Then clapping his hat on his head, and forgetting his overcoat, he rushed to the grocer's, and gave an order for two pounds of the best tea, and the same quantity of cut sugar, for Aunt Parrott. This was a cheap kind of happiness—so cheap that it was in the reach of almost any one, and yet, cheap as it was, it required the exercise of genuine kindness and unusual simplicity of heart to obtain it. We cannot laugh at John as he goes up the stairs with the bundles, which he had taken from the grocer's lay at the door. A great heart is slow to find out its own worth; indeed, from its depths unsuspected treasures are ever welling up; and these are so naturally appropriated by others, that they seem scarcely to belong to their possessor. Selfishness is essentially absorbing. It artfully catches the impulses which emanate from a noble nature, and turns them to its own advantage. Aunt Parrott was no exception to this rule. John Maribel's tea and sugar were but tea and sugar to her. She accepted

the material comfort, and failed to see the motive that idealized the simple gift. John Maribel, to her a son, was a "good fellow," delightfully ignorant of that worldly axiom, "Look out for number one," and consequently he was always getting the share of number two.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A LADY SO FAIR."

Will pass over the uneventful years of Kitty's infancy, to find its fair promise amply fulfilled; and as she stands now behind the counter—for she often replaces Mr. Pitkin in the shop—her refined and delicate presence is as evidently incongruous as a rare and fragrant exotic would be in a garden of herbs. From a low, polished forehead, her blonde hair was gathered into a loose knot at the back of her head. Little fluffy curls nestled lovingly on the white brow, and contrasted strongly with delicately-curved eyebrows, which were several shades darker. The eyes were full, and of a deep violet color, while the mouth had lost none of the witchery of its infantine smile, and with its rounded chin might have furnished to Zeuxis a model for his Helen, had she lived

In the days when he borrowed from the fair women of Crotona a study for his picture. Added to her charming face, and tall, well-developed figure, she possessed the inexplicable charm which jealous Nature has accorded to so few women, and which art must ever fail to imitate—the mystery of Grace. Her clear, sweet voice was calling now to Mr. Pitkin, and the old man, much bent, and thinner than in the days when we first made his acquaintance, came out from the parlor, saying:

"What's the trouble, deary?"

"It is Nellie, grandfather. She has come with Mrs. Parrott's love, to ask me to go there; but I think I had better stay; you may need me."

"No, no, child; business is dull enough now. It don't require you and me both to look after the shop; and—where is Jopo? Off again, I dare say."

"Only to take some packages which had to be sent at once, grandfather. I will wait until he returns."

She laid her pretty hand upon the old man's arm, and held up her face to him, smiling so artfully, that he forgot his irritation—grown to be chronic with him—and willingly gave his consent to her going.

Kitty had in a great measure taken the place of the good mother, from whom they had parted some years before with deep and bitter grief. They spoke of her now with a remembrance tinged with pain, but without the keen regret of recent bereavement.

Kitty sent Nellie off with the answer for Mrs. Parrott, and then ran up to her little room to change her dress. Her allowance of pocket-money was sufficient to permit her to satisfy her natural taste—in all respects an excellent taste—in choosing good materials, and having her clothes well made. When she again entered the shop, attired for walking, a customer turned to gaze at her with evident curiosity depicted on his face.

"Your daughter?" Mr. Pitkin.

"Yes," answered the old man shortly; for he was chary of his words when they went to satisfy questions about Kitty.

In the meantime a short, broad-shouldered specimen, of the genus boy had entered the shop, and stood with his greasy hands stuck into his greasy pockets, gazing at Kitty with open-mouthed admiration. Small, light-blue eyes, a head of sandy-colored hair, a nose like a mottled knob, and a wide mouth, with teeth which betrayed an unsparing use of tobacco—such was Jope. Outwardly, an uncooth grocer's boy; and yet possessing an abstract principle of taste which enabled him to see with other eyes than those which were now contemplating Kitty, and which contained the power of appreciation, and the virtue of a great and faithful devotion. Gladly would he have cast himself to the earth, and with the luminary of a Hindoo devotee have rejoiced to feel her little feet trampling over him; indeed, his imagination often revelled in the possibility of this

Juggernaut feat being performed by Kitty. Doubtless it was, metaphorically speaking, by Kitty, and by every one else; for a boy of this kind is strangely antagonistic to the tenderer emotions of the heart, I might even say to human sympathy. He is supposed to be as utterly incapable of physical suffering or fatigue as he is impervious to kindness or gentle treatment; and if by any chance he gives utterance to his agonized heart, he is rated as an "impertinent fellow," and threatened with dismissal. It is only a wonder that such boys ever grow up to be honest men, much more, marked citizens and successful merchants; for such antecedents belong to many of those who now wield the power of wealth, and constitute a strong and influential element of society.

Mr. Putkin was rattling Jopo roundly now, for giving a false weight of butter to Nellie Saca.

"You'll be the ruin of the shop. Where were your eyes?"

"Looking at her red head, I reckon. Don't you half believe what Nellie says about weights. It's them is false, and not me."

This very lucid speech set Kitty laughing; and she went off, gayly tripping along, her face shaded by her blue gauze veil. It was a long walk to John Martel's house; for years had brought not one, but many, rich patients to the now thriving physician, and he had sold the old house and lived quite in the suburbs—in a pretty cottage,

peering from a garden and facing a lovely boy, whence came the fresh breeze blowing inland, perfume-laden and health-bearing. He had changed his residence to please Mrs. Parrott, and, with him, this was equivalent to pleasing himself.

A shaded pathway ran parallel to the row which separated the houses from the beach; and Kitty sauntered leisurely along, watching the far-off white sails and thinking how fast they were bearing onward towards the treacherous ocean—that ocean that stretched out into boundless mystery, and into which the glowing sun seemed to be sinking. Kitty did not half understand the voices which spoke to her heart; but she listened to them and tried to catch their meaning. She was led by them towards that inexhaustible treasury that opens to those only who possess the faculty of seeing and feeling with that sense which a great intellect has called a sixth sense, and which is the inspiration of the beautiful.

The after-glow was dying out of the sky, the mystical twilight was creeping over land and sea, and Kitty instinctively quickened her steps.

"Kitty, Kitty!" and John Maribel was at her side clasping her hand and looking as pleased as only John could look.

"I am so glad that you have overtaken me," she said. "How is it that you are walking to-night?"

"How is it that I find you loitering here at this hour?"

Ah! Kitty, you forget that there is some risk in walking alone on this road. See that rough-looking man! His presence should be a warning to you, dear."

"And it will not be forgotten, dear John, but I do love this walk, and I am always thinking of its pleasant termination."

John Moribel did not answer, he merely stroked the little hand that lay so lovingly in his. He was thinking that Kitty was the dearest and most beautiful of girls; and these thoughts were mingled with the self-reproach which came to him with the knowledge that in some way he had made a sad mistake. He could not bear to associate this fair young creature with the coarse surroundings of her home; he could not bear to think that the fancies of her bright imagination—the confused images of beauty—the treasures of love, might languish and die out amid the coldness and barrenness of her life. She was a creature for the sunshine—a flower to expand under the genial influence of a warm, bright life; and here, through his mistake, by his stupid blundering, she was as obstinately bound to the old grocer as though she were of his own flesh and blood. He had made many and unavailing efforts to transfer Kitty to his own home; but, with unselfish devotion, she persistently refused to leave the old man, and honorably kept a promise which she had made to Mother Pitkan, to give him a daughter's love and duty. If anything could have raised her to a higher pinnacle of per-

fection in John's eyes, it would have been that heroic resolve; but he was now the less bent on her rescue; therefore he said:

"Kitty, have you thought over our conversation; or have you forgotten my request when we last met?"

"No, dear John, I believe I seldom forget anything that you say to me."

"Aunt Purrott has grown to love you, as every one seems to do, for that matter, and you are too sensible, and far too gentle, to resent her vagaries."

Kitty laughed. She was so accustomed to vagaries in every phase of septuagenary invention, that an objection to Aunt Purrott on that score scarcely struck her as a serious one.

"John," she said, "you are asking me to do the very thing that you could never bring yourself to do. You know that you are Aunt Purrott's slave; you know that you have delivered yourself over to her, to be tormented with old Greek tragedies, when you are dying to go to bed; and you have actually taken a professor of German to please her. Oh! woe Dr. Marshall, you are as easily moulded as wax in that old lady's hands."

Woman, whether young or old, possesses a wonderful pertinacity, which hangs on patiently to a man's opposition, gradually overcoming its resistance, and conquering at last, when he least intends to yield. The delicate subtlety of her tactics is seldom understood by the sterner

sex. She fights with weapons the use of which he does not know, and flatters his self-love and vanity by allowing him the honors of war, taking care to keep her triumph to herself. As John opened the garden gate, he knew that Kitty had again conquered; but her delicate appreciation of what was best in his own nature softened his disappointment.

Aunt Parrott looked as if she had not moved her position in all these years. There she was, cloak and all, just the same quaint old woman, wizened and shrivelled, but with the clear, sharp eyes that No. 66a had been heard to say pressed like cambric needles. The comparison was forcible, but altogether imaginative. To judge from Mrs. St. A's garments, she knew little, practically, of the pricks of cambric, or any other kind of needles.

Kitty drew a chair up to the table at Mrs. Parrott's elbow, and John, on the other side, sat looking pleasantly and satisfied; but now that we see him with the light shining on his face, we perceive that there is a change—a change of seventeen years—seventeen years of those experiences which, to a physician more than to any other man, are apt to be varied, and often painful. The face had lost somewhat of its fresh coloring, and the flexible mouth did not form itself into a smile so readily as of yore. He was thirty-nine years old: a young-looking man, it was said, for his age. Life's problem was being gradually worked out; and, it must be confessed, that

although the sum of experience was growing large, and he had cast it up again and again, the result continued to be far from satisfactory.

Love, in its healthful development, imparts to life its greatest charm. The tenderness which a great heart yields to a gentler, weaker creature, beautifies it and makes it the archetype of a purer love—draws it nearer to the divine source whence emanates its highest form. How cold and compassionless a machine is man, when untouched by this divine fire—when uninspired by genuine and unselfish love. To John Maribel any other was impossible. He looked earnestly at Kity as she talked to Mrs. Parrott, and the flush of a dear hope—the whisper of a possibility—brightened his loving eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

"I AM OLD AND FOOLISH."

MRS. PARROTT loved flowers; every morning she was wheeled into the garden to watch Neddie cut the roses which profusely adorned the room, and always formed a graceful centre-piece for the table. Flowers are God's messengers. We read them in

their exquisite colors; we trace upon their dainty petals the marvel of His handiwork; we breathe their fragrance, and remember whence it comes. Gather the pale primrose, the azure harebell, the delicate blush-rose, and the perfumed violet, and tell me if you do not see in their perfection an evidence of God's love; for surely in this great, bright, beautiful world, teeming with wonders and pregnant with His care for us, nowhere is it more lovingly expressed than in the gift of flowers.

Aunt Parrott's tears were real fountains for Kitty. She laughed and chatted, and was irresistibly amusing, and Nellie applauded with all her heart. She had hardly fashioned the philosophy of humor; but, like many of her race, she was keenly alive to its power, and Kitty, all unwittingly, was often delightfully dull, and tossed about her words without the slightest idea that she sometimes hit upon an antithesis. The kernel of humor lies in this nutshells; the crackers which we must use to get at it is antithesis. Use the crackers skillfully, and the result is—a laugh; and a laugh, like a glass of good old wine, exhilarates the spirits, warms the heart, and puts us on a better footing with ourselves and everybody else.

The moon opened on a verandah, and the repast over, John Marble wheeled out Aunt Parrott, and Kitty drew a rustic chair close beside her, and said:

"Now, Aunt Parrott, John, of course, is going to leave us, for in all probability he will have been sent for by

Mrs. Payson. What a comfort it must be to John to think that in her he has a never-failing patient. As long as her nerves hold out, she will play upon them to the tune of invalidism in all its variations."

"Well, dear, so much the better for John. I have always maintained that medicine is not a positive science—I don't speak of surgery—and that it admits of much latitude in its practice. A doctor has to defer to the imagination of his patients, which is indulged in proportion as their brains enable them to gratify it. Such patients, of course, are a godsend to physicians, and we must not quarrel with John's bread and butter."

"I wish he could get them from some other source to-night."

Mrs. Parrott had not heard Kitty's words. Her keen glance was fixed upon a mass of foliage forming a thick *boispetit* on the left of the house. She withdrew it with a nervous movement, and looked at Kitty with a strange, furtive expression. Once she started so violently that her fan and handkerchief fell to the floor. There was something weird in the pale face with the moonlight shining upon it. Kitty felt uncomfortable under the silence of the usually garrulous old woman, and wished heartily for John's return. Mrs. Parrott turned suddenly in her chair, and said:

"How is it, my dear, that you prefer to stay with old Pitkin, when you might come here?"

"Aunt Parrott, I am sure that I need not say to you that there are higher motives than inclination. When grandfather lives, I will never voluntarily leave him."

"Grandfather!" cried Mrs Parrott in a tone of contempt, unconsciously bitter at thought of the old man.

A scarlet flush mantled Kitty's brow, and her voice quivered with emotion as she answered:

"It is my misfortune to be able to claim no other relationship; and I take it to be unkind of you, Aunt Parrott, to arouse a doubt of its genuineness, unless," she added eagerly, "you can satisfy me that I am somebody else's grandchild."

Mrs Parrott, with a quick motion, placed her hand over Kitty's mouth. "Never ask me that, child. I know nothing; I am a foolish old woman, don't mind what I say."

Her agitation alarmed Kitty into forgetting her own deep concern. "Forgive me, pray forgive me, Aunt Parrott, if I have pained you. You know how much we love you—John and I."

"Yes, yes; God bless John Marshall! He has saved me from a wicked old age. How unfailing an navigator and sweetener in his kindness!"

Her sharp features softened, her voice grew slow and tender, as she continued: "I am a poor old woman, crying over baffled hopes. As long as hope is left to us, dear, we have a way something to live for. I have reached

that period when it has turned into ashes. And now I've spoiled your evening for you, and it is as much as old people ever do, when they forget that they have no right to rob the young of one moment of their fleeting happiness. What keeps John, I wonder? Ah! I hear his buggy-wheels."

Kitty was already on her way down the garden path to meet John.

CHAPTER X.

"THOU MY SOMETIME DAUGHTER."



Al! John, I am so glad that you have come."

"What has occurred, darling? You look as white as a ghost."

"I'm afraid that Aunt Parrott is not well, John. You can't imagine how her words and manner have startled me."

John Maribel looked towards the old woman, sitting so still, and quickened his pace; but Mrs. Parrott had quite recovered her wonted calmness, and Kitty went off to get her wrappings, while he sat down beside her.

"I've just had a call, Aunt Parrott, to go to Worleigh," he said. "A gentleman was waiting at the gate for me—quite an elegant-looking personage—who was urgent that

I should set out at once. Some accident has occurred there. Workagh, you remember, is the residence of Hugh Wetherham; and Perry has been employed there for the past year making repairs. I must, of course, go; but first I will accompany Kitty home. You are not well, Aunt Parrott!" he exclaimed, remarking the extreme pallor of her face.

"I am perfectly well, John, perfectly well. You have a good ten miles' ride before you, and no time to lose."

Her manner reassured him, and as Kitty was ready, they said good-night, leaving her sitting there, for she had refused to go in. The moon hung low over the bay. The mingled wave and moonlit horizon gave that hint of infinity which comes with widespread waters. The stillness was broken by the footsteps only of a belated pedestrian or the rumble of a chance vehicle. Such was the position of things—Nellie napping in the dining room, and her mistress nursing in her chair. From long habit Nellie awoke at the slightest word from her mistress; and she was too accustomed to her caprices to feel surprised at her determination to sit up later than usual. So she made herself comfortable in an arm-chair, and slept contentedly, while the garden-gate opened, and a woman came swiftly up the path, clearly defixed in the moonlight.

"Agatha, Agatha! my daughter, you have come to me after all these long, weary years."

"Yes, mother, at last! I have waited for this hour.

I owed so much to you that I should not come back an outcast. I have been tempted a thousand times to break my compact. Well is it for me I have the will to quench the volcano of passion which burns within my breast. I admit that I have done much wrong; but my punishment has been heavy, and the cruel world has not helped me to bear it patiently. Dared I revenge myself upon it now, I would throw back its deceitful adulation—its mean sycophancy; I would give it scorn for smirks, and show it, that the glamour of success has not made me forgetful of its past treachery. I reign now, where once I was a suppliant; and no tyrant is so merciless as he who has once been a slave. The one pure joy of my life was snatched from me by the cruelty of him who, out of very pity for my desolate misery, might have shown me mercy."

She had risen to her feet, her slight figure quivering with excitement, and her face glowing with an almost tragic beauty.

"Like a tigress watching for her stolen offspring, so I lay in wait for her," she continued, "and I saw her—I saw the fair, young face—I heard the sweet, pure voice saying: 'Dear John, how good you are.' The sound of that voice has aroused within me all the unsated yearning of motherhood." She paused a moment and then added with bitter irony: "This good John Maribel has well fulfilled his charge, don't you think so? I have come, mother, as I did once before, to ask you to help me.

You have played your part nobly, generously to me; for I comprehend what it costs to a soul like yours to lend itself to deception; and if ever a means justifies an end, surely the salvation of a young life ought to do it. You know that this excitable, nervous organization of mine is tremendously alive to the impressions of the moment; but my gratitude to you is something more than the vibration of the nerves. It is more truly the vibration of that chord of affection, which must awaken a response in your heart. Trained by you, Kitty has been saved from the consequences of old Featherstone's revengeful hate; and to look at her, one would scarcely suspect that she had been nurtured amid the vulgar surroundings of the shop. Thank God that she has been saved from the vulgarity engendered by low association! Now, perfect your work, mother, and help me; I have plans for her. I have marked out a brilliant career for her and——"

"Agatha! Agatha! take care; your hot wilfulness will lead you into danger. Leave the child where she is. Has your experience not taught you that there is an inexorable justice which metes out to us the portion of the harvest which we ourselves have sown? Leave Kitty where she is. Believe me, there is danger in tampering with the conditions which have so long bound you. Wait, my daughter, with sustaining patience. Comfort will come to you in the end."

"Do not attempt to turn me with these remonstrances?"

Do you suppose that I, who have sold my life's happiness for old Featherstone's money, will be aught to risk its loss? Kitty once my mistress, my triumph will be complete. You say that she is safer where she is. Is John Maribel more than man, that he should be insensible to her beauty? I tell you, it does not suit me. Do you heed me? It must never be."

"Agatha, you have tried me sorely! What would you have me do?"

"Oh! to think of her," she cried, evading a direct answer, "yielding her sweet duty and affection to crabbled old Palkin. Why could not John Maribel have given her to you?"

"I have so I deemed me unfitted for the charge. When he brought the forlorn child away from Stony-hill, I doubt much whether the thought of placing her in my care ever entered his mind. There was a palpable incongruity between the pretty little creature and an old and fretful woman like me. He said what was far better for her; I surrounded her with an atmosphere of love. She has been brought up in sunshine, and thus expanded, like a beautiful flower, drinking in its life from a genial source. Trillo not, Agatha, with those pure and noble sentiments which are her best safeguards."

"Al!" exclaimed Agatha, impatiently, "have done, I beseech you. Catherine Featherstone has been Kitty Palkin long enough."

"Surely you do not mean, after all these years of submission, to forfeit your compact with Mr. Featherstone? Think of the consequences to Kitty!"

"You do not comprehend me. There are reasons which must forever separate me from the acknowledged affection of my child, and my precautions are duly taken. Look at me," she exclaimed, letting fall the light shawl which covered her person, and concealed the richness of her dress. "The Mistress of Worleigh can surely invite whom she pleases to her house."

Mrs. Parrott was speechless for a moment; and then, in a frightened, tremulous whisper, she asked:

"Agatha, have you done *that*?"

"Yes."

There was silence between them. The old woman sat with bent head and hands clasped, waiting to hear more, as the younger one stood looking at her. At last, she laid her jewelled hand upon the poor, old, trembling fingers, and said:

"You are grieved; I knew you would be. I did it for Kitty's sake; for I do not love the man; but his wealth was necessary to me. Poverty makes a fiend of me. Rich dresses, and jewels, and ease, and luxury mean to me, as they do to many others, an absence of temptation; and the natural sequence—a pleasant and easy method to learn to be good. It is growing late, I must say good-night. Our plans have worked admirably; for Dr. Maribel is now on

his way to Worleigh, and I shall find him there to-morrow morning. Babel, my French maid, has only a sprained ankle; but she will have followed my directions but poorly should and not succeed in detaining the doctor until my arrival. Be prepared for a description of the charming and *spirituelle* Mrs. Wilbraham.

"It made the laughter of an afternoon
That Vision should attempt the blameless King."

"I know full well," answered Mrs. Parratt, "that the first thought of your fascinated victims is one of admiration for those qualities which are the more dangerous because you use them to cover the real bitterness of your contempt for them. John Maribel deserves better at your hands."

"Good-night," she answered, stooping and kissing the old lady. "John Maribel is safe from my wiles; but he must not thwart me."

There was a faint odor of *bouquet de violettes*, another light kiss on the brow, and Mrs. Parratt was left alone.

Nellie's slumbers had been troubled by the sound of voices. She was fully sensible of a presence which was not there when her eyes closed; and the impression was intensified by a dream, which so terrified her that, with hair standing on end, and wild, dilated eyes, she rushed out on the verandah, just in time to see Agatha sitting down the garden path.

"Oh, Lord, ma'am! I've had such a turn! My head's that gone that I can't know as I am on it or my heels; and if I ain't gone blind, I see somebody going down the walk."

"Fie on you, Nellie Shra! You have had a bad dream. I warrant that you ate pork and cabbage at dinner."

"So I did, ma'am, and so I have many and many's the time before; but it never had the effect of making me see a woman going out of the gate. God help me, if pork and cabbage is going to make me see visions!"

"I tell you," exclaimed Mrs. Parrott, "that you've had a bad dream, girl. The impression was still upon you when you came out here. I have no patience dealing with unreasonable people. Wheel me in; I will go to bed."

CHAPTER XI

"WHAT ARE YOU? A GENTLEMAN."

THE jaded horses were slowly toiling up the last hill before reaching the stretch of level road that, bordered on each side by fences covered with Cherokee roses, led to the entrance of Worreigh. Long streaks of red and orange light began to shoot up from the

east and west of day, and the stars paled in the flood of glory that illumined the sky and gave to nature a thousand varied tints from hill and dale. Awakening also greeted another day; and bird and beast sent forth, in their own peculiar language, a joyful recognition of its return. It was not so gladly welcomed by the occupants of the carriage. They had hoped to reach the house before the servants were astir; for although they had gone to town the day before, ostensibly to attend a ball, they were not quite sure but that the peculiar impatience of the negro, and his cunning sagacity, might not have divined another purpose. Mrs. Wilbraham pulled the check-string.

"I will send the carriage directly to the stable, Gaston. The early freshness tempts me to walk, and then I may be fortunate enough to reach my room without meeting Eleanor. I can't bear her looks when she disapproves."

Stepping from the carriage, she ordered the coachman to drive on, and walking quickly by the side of her companion, they struck into a forest path, crossing a rustic bridge which spanned a limpid creek that formed a boundary to the grounds of Worleigh.

Here nature had been left to her free energies. Towering in their primitive shapes, the forest trees, with arching limbs, embowered the old-fashioned mansion, rising from an on inenco and separated by a terraced garden in front

from a lawn gradually sloping to the stream. Its course, running for some distance parallel to the fence, made a *détour*, entering the grounds, where, chastened not destroyed, the rich luxuriance of its banks gave to the climbing vines free scope to wreath their graceful festoons over the clear waters, which meandered their way, sometimes concealed by the thickets from sight, again to burst in gladness on the view, until gathered in an ample basin, whose margin combined the useful with the picturesque. A rustic arbor stood on the grass-covered bank of the stream, with steps leading down to the water. It formed a most delightful retreat during the heat of a summer day, with the hum of the bees in the woodland and the gurgling of water over the pebbles. Within this inviting bowyer Agatha sought a temporary retreat to compose her thoughts and to recuperate from the exhaustion of a walk too rapid for a *physique* naturally frail and excitable.

Her companion stood leaning against the door. There was that in his glance which told her the thought which had intensified it. She suffered under it that pang which comes to a woman when she recognizes for the first time the searching look which grows critical as the warmth of love or admiration begins to die out. It is a fatal moment to her.

"It will never do, Agatha, thus to agitate yourself. You really look ghastly."

She rose with a quick movement, drawing her shawl

closely around her figure, and as she passed by him she said:

"*Je ne sais que trop quels tourments je me prépare.*"

Miss Eleanor Wilbraham was an early riser; she was standing on the piazza when Agatha came up the steps. A "Good morning, Eleanor," and she flitted by before the good lady had time to administer the words of caution and advice as to the best manner of countervailing the effects of a night of dissipation, which her sister-in-law's extreme pallor naturally suggested. Mr. de Roussy, who had been for some time a privileged guest at Worcester, came smilingly forward, extending his hand, saying:

"My dear Miss Eleanor, you are early this morning."

Miss Eleanor received De Roussy's salutation with just that tinge of *hauteur* in her manner which, to a woman of her high breeding, was the only mode that good manners suggested in expressing disapprobation. It is a curious anomaly that persons essentially pure-minded are apt to foster in the inner chambers of their minds a latent suspicion of vice, which keeps them constantly guarded by a modest defiance, and leaves them little latitude for the exercise of charity. In Miss Eleanor's case a marked bias of prejudice warped her opinions in regard to foreigners in general, and of Gaston de Roussy in particular. He was, as he acknowledged, a *France-Américain*; but this only made matters worse with Miss Eleanor. She could not forgive him his French father, his French manners,

and, least of all, his presence at Worleigh and his intimacy with her brother's wife. Now, as the world goes, this intimacy was perfectly natural between persons of close consanguinity—cousins in the first degree, for instance—and there was positively nothing at which Miss Eleanor could take umbrage, except that under the new *régime* established by Mrs. Wilbraham, obsolete rules and antiquated ideas of propriety had been set aside, and the simple plantation life broken upon by foreign habits and—foreign morals.

Now Miss Eleanor carried about with her as *argent mignon* her family pride, and as it was continually jingling in her ears, it may be supposed that it acted as a constant reminder, and kept her on the *qui-vive* for some dereliction on the part of her brother's wife from those rules of strict propriety which, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, had hitherto been considered inviolable in the Wilbraham family. When we will have made the reader more fully acquainted with Agatha and Mr. de Roucy we think that he will admit that this gentle southern matron was led a most uncomfortable life between them.

Gaston de Roucy was a man of the world, and possessed in a high degree that knowledge of it which, taken in its "widest signification, is the knowledge of civilized humanity."

By the Chinese, physiognomy is recognized as evidence

in courts of justice; and with this remote authority I will attempt to describe the *personnel* of Mr de Rouxy, in order that my readers may judge for themselves and form their own opinions.

His eyes, full, black and expressive—a deal too much so on occasion—were set a little too near to a nose which was inclined to the aquiline. His lips, curving handsomely outward, displayed a row of brilliant teeth when he smiled, as you may be sure he did on every possible occasion, and these smiles worked admirably in concert with his eyes. The forehead was high on the temples; but this defect was remedied by the arrangement of his hair. A tall, graceful figure and a gentleman's taste in dress, which means a simplicity which shuns extravagance, but courts elegance, and you have Mr Gaston de Rouxy. His was an air of suave self-possession, and in the drawing room easily gained an ascendancy, pleasing by those arts acquired by contact with the world, and denoting in the *persiflage* which often passes current for better wit. Men rarely took to him, because it required but little discrimination to discover an utter lack of those principles which they are apt to look for in one of their sex. A worshipper at the shrine of the *Duchesse*, he propitiated her unscrupulously; skilled, it was said, in a marvellous manipulation of cards, which helped him to the indulgence of extravagant tastes and compelled a frequent change of residence. During a life of adventurous exploits, some of them re-

flecting hazily upon his character, he had acquired a perfect knowledge of English, French, and German; and being a true cosmopolitan, could adapt himself surprisingly to each of these nationalities. Now that he was enjoying the privileges of a guest at Workigh, this adaptability won for him the good-will and hospitality of the neighboring families. To have seen him with a large party to him, walking through the fields with Col. Covington, one would have declared that he looked the country gentleman to perfection. Miss Eleanor, however, could not be caught by the chaff which he so dexterously threw, and disliked him as cordially as it was in her power to dislike any one. More than once was she tempted to remonstrate with Agatha for permitting him the privilege of relationship, so sure was she that it would be highly distasteful to her brother; but Agatha quietly snubbed poor Miss Eleanor, and held her sceptre all the more firmly for the protests against her authority, which, if only implied, were none the less irritating to her. She was duly made sensible, by those infinitesimal atoms of domestic annoyance which worry and sting with the pertinacity of a swarm of gnats, that her husband's sister considered her unfit for the responsible duties of a Southern mistress. Indeed, Miss Eleanor deplored what she considered her brother's infatuation; for, with the intuition of love, she saw deeply into the heart of this woman whom her brother brought to Workigh, vouchsafing her no explanation of his sudden

marriage and leaving her in utter ignorance of his wife's family connections. With the advent of this new wife had commenced a reign of extravagance that subverted completely the economical and prudent way which, for so many years, had governed the household at Worleigh. Miss Eleanor deferred, with what grace she might, to the fact that her brother's passion for the fascinating Circe bound him as a willing slave under the magic of the draught which she held to his lips.

It is a serious cause for pity that a young man should be his master at an age when the bit and bridle, with a very strong curb, are needed to guide his powers. With a large estate, a handsome person, and talent far above the average order, Hugh Wilbrham had all these advantages. Marred by an impressionable organization, which had led him into the fatal error of marrying a woman versed in all the arts of a *femme du monde*, and one, too, whose experience was superior to his own, inasmuch as there was a marked disparity of years between them, the difference, unfortunately, being on the woman's side.

About this period of our writing, Mr. Wilbrham had been suddenly called from home on public business, and Mrs. Wilbrham had pleaded a state of delicate health as a reason for her unwillingness to face the trials of an ocean voyage. The development of our story will show that she had far deeper and more serious reasons for declining to accompany her husband. He was essentially a gentleman,

belonging to that class of landed proprietors distinguished for noble hospitality, culture, and refinement. These, as a class, are as distinct from the *nouveaux riches* of to-day as are the fungi appropriately called by the ancients "children of the earth," to mark their obscure origin, distinct from the aged oak from whose decay they derive their existence—a class that still retain with their noble poverty the pride which led them unflinchingly to sacrifice their ancestral estates, and enables them now to bear with uncomplaining patience the snare of adverse fate.

CHAPTER XII

"LOOK, HERE'S THY LOVE!"

MR. DE ROUSY bowed himself away, and Miss Eleanor, with sun-bonnet and garden gloves, went out among her flowers. Roderick, the Scotch gardener, justly prided himself upon his roses, and on that particular morning the garden was brilliant and gorgeous with the rarest varieties of this queen of flowers. Regally they sat upon their stems, the revivifying sunlight brightening the matchless colors and mellowing the exquisite perfumes. In laying out this garden, Roderick had discarded all trickery of human invention, and depended

mainly on the glorious hues of the flowers and the graceful forms of plants and shrubs as the chief adornment. Reluctantly he proceeded to make Miss Eleanor's bouquet, and although he had done it every morning for several years, from the early spring to the latest days of autumn, he always cut his flowers under protest.

"Ano wadna be uncivil," he said, "to the mistress; but I ken sma' profit in cutting the flowers, when there's no siller to get for them."

Miss Eleanor had taken the flowers from his hand, and was slowly retracing her footsteps towards the house, when she espied two men crossing the lawn. One wore a workman's apron and carried a box of tools, his tall, well-knit form towering slightly above his companion, who was talking eagerly to him. Miss Eleanor readily guessed the stranger to be Dr. Maribel; for, being short-sighted, she could not distinguish his features. Calling to Roderick, she said:

"Who is that with Perry Deane?"

"Troth, ma'am, I canna weel say, if it's not the doctor come to see that puir thing, Babet."

"So, they sent all the way to town for Dr. Maribel! We never needed the doctor before for finger aches; and a basin of cold water was all that was wanted for Babet's foot."

Miss Eleanor inwardly apostrophized Babet as a piece of French millinery and affectation, whose honesty was

more than doubtful, and whose wiles and flattery were simply disgusting. One Nancy, who had been reared for the purpose of filling the place of lady's maid to "Mrs. Hugh's wife," was a pet of Miss Eleanor's, and Mrs. Wilbraham's persistency in keeping the Frenchwoman, to the detriment of Nancy, was a sore and grievous injustice in her eyes. She gave another glance at the two men, who were passing around the house, going towards the stables, which were in course of erection; then she went in to place her flowers in vases—a task which she delegated to no other hands.

In the meantime John Maribel and Perry Deane had reached the temporary shed under which Perry's workbench stood; and John, seating himself on a corner of it, went on with what he was saying, while Perry prepared to commence his work.

"I tell you, Perry, it won't do. Your staying here, performing the task of a common workman, and getting no better wages, is but one form of folly."

"I don't see as I have any right to complain, Doctor. It was optional with me to come or not, and I chose to come."

His face was slightly flushed, and there was that tinge of embarrassment in his manner which the consciousness of reservation communicated.

John Maribel looked intent at him for a moment, and then said: "You have always stood in your own light,

Perry. When I've wanted you to cut loose from old Graham, you have obstinately refused, alleging as your reason for continuing in his employ that you were too poor a man to risk competition, but your real reason was that you were too proud to borrow of me. Am I not right?"

"Well, you know, Doctor, that I've always been against borrowing, though I don't know but that I could have paid you; still my mind is easier to go on in the old way until something better turns up. I shan't be through here before fall, and, before Mr. Wilbraham went away, he was saying something to me about work that is wanted at Col. Covington's. If I can get the job, I've half a mind to quit Graham, who has been getting rich, while I've hardly enough had up to bury me if I should fall off the roof of that stable to-day. I've a mind to stay about here as long as I am sure of work. It's a different thing dealing with gentlemen and such folks as old Graham; but Mr. Wilbraham made the contract with him, and I was sent to superintend the work. I have had as much to do as any of the men, and get very little more than they do."

"Well, Perry, old fellow," answered John Maribel, "just put your pride out of the way, and remember, whenever you need it, that I have a hundred or so to spare. By-the-by, where are you staying?"

It was an idle question, suggested to Dr. Maribel most probably by the fact that he had encountered Perry on

the outskirts of the grounds, whither he had wandered, urged by curiosity to explore a place which was noted for being under a higher degree of culture than was usually found in the homes of the planters. He was, therefore, unprepared for the effect of his words. Perry let fall his measure, and if stooping to pick it up produced the vivid flush on his face, the same reason could scarcely have been assigned for the excessive awkwardness of his manner, as, with a glance at Dr. Maribel, he answered, "My quarters are up at Hillside, at Square Blackwell's."

This would have satisfied Dr. Maribel, who was far from guessing that Perry had anything to conceal from him, but not the notes of a clear, rich, contralto voice, coming from the forest-road, neck of the stables, produced an increased embarrassment, which resulted in an accident; for Perry cut his finger with the chisel; while the singer, appearing now in sight, suddenly ceased her song, and drawing her sun-bonnet over her face, passed without apparently noticing the two men who were gazing after her.

The intuition of true delicacy helps to guard the sacredness of a surprised secret. It was therefore perfectly natural that Dr. Maribel should have said good by to Perry with an air of consciousness, while Perry was too truly ashamed of himself to do more than return the hand-shake.

Meanwhile, the cause of all this perturbation had found her way into the kitchen, where, seating herself near the

door, she took off her sun bonnet, revealing the bright, handsome face of Squire Blackwell's daughter.

"How's your ma, Abby?" said Sabra, the cook, wiping her hands on her apron preparatory to presenting one of them to Abby; for the negro has a code of etiquette to which he holds as rigidly as does the elegant habitué of the *grand monde* to the rules and regulations dictated by the capricious sovereign, Fashion. It is manifested, in the negro I mean, by an extreme anxiety for the health and welfare of the family in question, being rarely exhausted until every member of it has had a fair share of notice.

"Well, thank you, Sabra, ma she's but poorly," answered Abby; "not much account to do anything, but she managed to get around yesterday and pick up a sharp lot of eggs; so I fetched them down to Miss Eleanor with the butter."

"Thank de Lord, you did! Our hens don't lay 'cording to the feed they gets."

"I quite agree with you, Sabra," said Miss Eleanor, appearing at the pantry door, "that we have a most ungrateful lot of Leas. Good-morning, Abby; I'm glad that you have brought us some eggs."

Abby took up her basket, and followed Miss Eleanor into the pantry.

"Count the eggs, my child. I will call Spencer to weigh the butter."

One by one the white, transparent eggs were carefully transferred from the basket to the earthen bowl which had been placed to receive them, while the color deepened on Abby's cheeks, as she felt that Miss Eleanor's eyes rested upon her with a deeper scrutiny than was altogether pleasant—an anticipatory uncomfortableness, such as we experience before swallowing a dose of medicine. The principle of faith in good advice is strong in the minds of middle-aged persons, and Miss Eleanor was no exception to the rule. She classed it with those remedies which work a cure by constant application. When the basket stood ready—for a bottle of Madeira and other delicacies had been put in for Mrs. Blackwell—and Spencer had returned to his duties in the dining-room, Miss Eleanor laid her hand on Abby's arm, and said :

"Your father's long and faithful service, my child, and his devotion to our family, would be but poorly repaid should I fail to point out to you those dangers which menace youth, but which are doubly perilous to a hand-some, and, I fear, a giddy girl. We have strangers and foreigners here, Abby—people who hold lightly what we consider of the highest importance. I think you understand me. I hear that Mr. de' Rousy has been to the farm; that he makes it convenient to stop there when he goes out gunning."

"Is! Miss, who could have told you that he stopped there to see me?"

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"My experience, from long observation of people's motives, leads me to doubt whether he lingered at your house for an hour last Thursday for the pleasure of your mother's society. Young men are not apt to find such society enticing."

"Well, Miss Eleanor, I declare I never said a dozen words to him."

"That may be very true, Abby, and I would advise a like reserve in future; but I strongly suspect that the object of his visit was as fully attained without your taking part in the conversation."

"You needn't be uneasy about me, Miss Eleanor," she answered, as she tied on her bonnet. "I'll be down again next week, and ma will be glad of the wine. Good-by."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I LONG TO HAVE SOME CHAT WITH HER."

"A purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves."



ND so did John Marbel, by taking "false for true."

Agatha Wilbraham, with the *agaceries* of an accomplished actress, sought out the over ready and

generous impulses of his nature, and worked upon them with so subtle and delicate a skill, that he yielded his sober judgment to her capricious will, as many had done before him. Men are not wiser to-day than were those ancient heroes—passengers aboard the good ship *Argo*; and they will throw themselves into the sea, metaphorically, with the same headlong readiness as did *Dates*, to reach the flowery isle of the Sirens—whether in Greek drapery, ermine, or “pull-backs,” it matters little; and Antony’s words to *Cleopatra*,

“Egypt, thou knew’st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after,”

is as applicable in the nineteenth century and the centennial year of American independence, as it was when the great captain bent his “goodly eyes upon a tawny front.”

“Dr. Maribel,” continued Mrs. Wilbraham, as they stood talking in the drawing-room after breakfast, “I hear that you have a charming protégée. Will I be indiscreet in asking you to afford me the pleasure of seeing her?”

A sigh scarcely audible, but so drawn out as to convey the idea that this frail, interesting creature was pining herself to death in the lonely graveyard of Worleigh, was the prelude to an appeal which was dangerous, because she was not counterfeiting—a real, strong feeling led her to

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look so earnestly at John Maribel, and to throw into her tone and manner the language and enticing softness of entreaty.

"You see that I am not strong," she said. "I would really be better—I am sure I would—for the variety which a pure, young mind—a fresh, bright nature, would afford me."

Now this sort of thing was peculiarly trying to John Maribel. Like most thoroughly honest people, the ugly fiend suspicion, seldom interposed its hateful caution in the conclusions at which he arrived; and a simulation of feeling which responded to his own was accepted without question, proving—not surely his wisdom—but a charming faith in human nature, which involves some excellent qualities of heart, but too often proves a damaging investment.

Mrs. Wilbraham's words were poured forth so fluently and graciously, her eyes grew so tender and beseeching, that John Maribel was shorn of his opposition as completely and submissively as is that much abused, but biblically honored animal, the sheep, when the snapping shears rob it of its wool. She followed him to the door, her soft musing inquiries flowing around her; her graceful, winning manner creating in John's mind a pleasurable impression, which the peculiar sweetness of her voice served to deepen.

"May I count upon your acquiescence, Dr. Maribel?"

"You surely may depend upon me, madam," he replied.

"I cannot, however, answer for Miss Pitkin. She is apt to be a little obstinate where Mr. Pitkin is concerned, and no pleasure would entice her from the old man, should his ailments or his caprice require her presence."

"Good heavens! is he a Titonus?" exclaimed Agatha.

"Could you see him," answered John, laughing, "you would scarce, even with the aid of a brilliant imagination, connect this tall, ungainly old hypochondriac with the glorious beauty that asked for immortality."

"How can you leave the young creature to such influences? Oh! Dr. Maribel, are you not responsible for this?"

He was startled at her earnestness into forgetting to quest on her right thus to speak to him. The justice of the reproach conveyed in Mrs. Wilbraham's words was keenly realized.

"When," he answered, "a man has carried a homeless child in his arms for twenty miles, on a stormy night, he may be pardoned, I think, for having turned with instinctive readiness to the first warm, bright suggestions when presented themselves to his mind. Infancy needs the sunshine of love—the indulgence of gentle hearts and an easy forgiveness for its innocent shortcomings. I knew that I ought not to take her to my own home; indeed, I don't know that I even thought for a moment of so doing. My mind, from the commencement of our journey, was

occupied in solving the question as to the disposal of my charge, in order to secure for her what I considered absolutely indispensable for a child of her tender years. I fixed upon Mrs. Pitkin as fulfilling, in a higher degree than any one whom I knew, my idea of a kind and motherly nature; and then the inclemency of the night urged a rapid decision. It is different to-day; but the mistakes of youth cannot always be remedied by the experience of mature years. We go through life with the consciousness of laboring under the disadvantageous consequences of repeated mistakes. I acknowledge that, in the case of Miss Pitkin, I have committed a very serious one. Her strong sense of duty to the old man is proof against any extraneous influence which may be brought to bear upon it; and I believe I too truly admire her dutiful adherence to the faith of her childhood to be willing to see it less truly loyal than it is. She sees old Pitkin through the halo of her sweet, grateful affection, and I scarcely think that I have a right to take away from her the innocent, I would say angelic, satisfaction of rendering back to the old man what she received so unstintingly from his excellent wife."

John Maribel had been led on to say so much by Mrs. Wilbraham's encouragement of look and manner, and when he ceased speaking, his face flushed crimson with the consciousness of having, in what he had said, been guilty of an attempt at justification.

"I cannot see things as you do, Dr. Maribel," answered Agatha, whose pallor struck him as being abnormally suggestive of complete physical exhaustion. "A young life sacrificing itself is poetically very beautiful, practically very bad. Your protégé is sacrificing the first, best joys of her budding life; they come but once, and die out quick enough. Forgive me," she added, recovering her self-possession, "I am foolishly in earnest when I ride a hobby; and ever since I have heard of Miss Pitkin and her romantic history I have felt an absorbing desire to see her. Will you not bring her to me? You will come again to see my poor Babet—pray let it be this very week. I shall not feel easy until I see her quite restored; she is really nervous."

John Maribel reflected for a moment. He knew that Babet's sufferings were purely of the imagination; and imaginary ills were not strictly within the range of his science. The vivification of honesty is a subtle process; difficult, because its standard varies according to the constitution of our moral nature. Its various modifications would be a curious study. Now John Maribel, essentially upright as he was, fell naturally into the very common deceit of humoring a woman's foibles and unblushingly profiting by their indulgence. It is legitimate grief that comes to the mill of professional privilege.

The reflections of John Maribel, as he drove back to town, were embittered by a sense of dissatisfaction with

himself, more pronounced than that feeling was apt to be with him, as he realized that he was actually irritated against Mr. Pitkin for holding on so obstinately to the tenure of his crabbed life, thus rendering Kitty's release a matter of indefinite probability. As he drew up his horse before the office door he was somewhat startled to find Jope there, dressed with an unusual attempt at "style," and wearing his hat with a jaunty, devil-may-care air that manifested a very strong and determined intention to appear in an entirely new character, which was so out of keeping with his usually slovenly, not to say dirty, attire, that John Maribel laughed outright as the boy took off his hat to him.

"What on earth, Jope, have you been doing to yourself?" he said, looking at the boy from head to foot.

"Please to let me go in, sir, along of you, and I'll tell you what's up; only I hope you don't think as there's anything out of the way with me?"

John Maribel at once sobered his face, and bade Jope follow him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I SCORN THAT WITH MY HEELS."



ELL, Jape," said John Maribel, seating himself and passing his fingers through his hair, "has Mr. Pickin raised your wages and given you a holiday?"

"He raise my wages! he would sooner scrape the flesh from my bones and sell 'em for a skeleton; and as to holiday, I get only the fag end of Sunday, and a double dose of chaff for it on Monday. I tell you what, Doctor, a man's got to assert himself some time, and if he don't know when he's got rights, he takes it kind of somebody to tell him. Now, then upon' that I've stood; the suspicion of things as I'd scorn to be guilty of; the being obliged to stand by and see the nutmegs counted, and to be patted about the chest every night, as if he was examining of me for the consumption, when he's only a feeling for cut sugar that he thinks I've got hid away under my coat. Oh! I've stood it all and had it piled on and on to me, and didn't say as I'd like to choke him, because of Miss Kitty; and I'd be thankful to let her walk over me, only she's that sweet and good, that she'd sooner die than to put upon anybody. Well, air, I've been turnin' things around in my mind this

good while. It's my opinion that every man's got something as he can fall back upon, or he ought to have; and if my head's empty for want of learning, and gets buzzing around with ole Pitkin's jaw, well, my feet they makes up, in a manner, for it, and—I've—concluded—sir, to go in the song and dance business!"

This climax brought John Maribel up to the height of astonishment. He stood looking at Jope as if trying to identify him. His preconceived ideas of the grocer-boy were so completely subverted by the earnest, if ungrammatical, recital of his wrongs, and by his bold determination to redress them. Jope had struck upon a chord of sympathy which vibrated clearly and strongly. The ridiculous figure no longer excited a desire to laugh in John Maribel. Jope was doing what every soul is urged by its highest impulses to do—struggling to free himself from a tyrannical yoke, while the motive which had led him so long to submit to it was as purely chivalrous as that which gave themes to the Provençal poets, to be sung by the wandering troubadours. The little sweetness which the boy had tasted during his hard childhood had come to him through Kitty's smiles and pleasant words.

John Maribel, while he entered earnestly into Jope's troubles, was gravely in doubt how to advise him; his figure was certainly little suggestive of that "graceful, grotesque, and artistic motion" described on the play-bills; nor could he by the utmost stretch of imagination conceive

of "Love among the Roses" coming from Jope's lips. Talent has been seen, however, under the most unpromising of exteriors, and John Maribel was the last one to say words of discouragement to this would-be artist, or, in fact, to any one who manifested an earnest purpose in an undertaking. With him kindness was something more than easy acquiescence, which is mischievous in proportion as the interest involved by the one who asks argues a complete faith in the power to bestow, and when that faith is shaken it lowers the standard of human virtue and acts adversely, especially upon the young. John Maribel reflected that grace had little part in the exhibitions of minstrelsy, and that ludicrous contortions were remarkably mirth-creating, but he was little prepared to see a practical display of Jope's talents.

His coat was placed on a chair, his hat on the top of it; he drew in the buckle of his pants, passed a dingy handkerchief over his face, threw himself into position, and sang "Betsey Bumble Bee." Surprised followed upon surprise, for at the end of the first verse Jope stepped out, and, with a hitch in his gait and a peculiar swing of the body, walked around the table which occupied the centre of the room. Having twice made the circle he paused for an instant, and then with a spasmodic jerk and an alarming forward motion, as though he intended an assault upon Dr. Maribel, he suddenly righted himself, brought his heels, and came down upon his toes until the old carpet

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sent out such clouds of dust that performer and spectators were well-nigh suffocated.

A crowd had collected about the door of the office, attracted by the sound of laughter and the thumping of feet, while shouts of "Good for you, Jope! Well done, old fellow!" strongly indicated that his laughable antics were in keeping with the spirit of the times, and that the applause of the *impromptu* audience might be an earnest of future triumphs in his chosen profession. Encouraged by applause—and who is not?—poor Jope redoubled his efforts until, with crimson face and dripping from every pore, he was fain to give out from want of breath. When he had recovered himself sufficiently to articulate his words, and feeling a degree of self-satisfaction, which is the natural result of triumph, he said:

"Now, Doctor, what do you think of it?"

Before Dr. Maribel could reply, there was a diversion at the door; and Kitty appeared, her cheeks glowing, and something very like indignation in her eyes.

"Oh, Jope! you ungrateful boy; what a figure you cut! Poor, foolish, nonsensical fellow, I am heartily ashamed of you!"

"Please, Miss Kitty," answered the now crest-fallen song and dance man, "it was all along of the tappings and the rattles. A man's chest is his own; nobody's got a right to be thumping of it, as mighty it's done."

"Yes, you poor, foolish boy!" cried Kitty. "What

are grandfather's little disagreeable ways compared to your duty? I must say that I hardly expected that you would have left all the trouble of the shop on my hands."

There was a choking sound, a gulp, and the embryo artist ignominiously succumbed to Kitty's reproaches, and literally blubbered.

John Maribel had considerably dismissed the audience, and closed the door, so that the distressing capitulation was made without witnesses. He soothed Kitty in his own gentle way, assuring her that there was much to be said in favor of the culprit; finally obtaining clemency for Lim, and a promised restoration to her good opinion.

In the mean time Jope had resumed his coat; the crimson cravat had been thrust into pocket, and his drooping and disconsolate look appealed so earnestly to Kitty's compassionate heart, that with a half tender manner, she bade him go back to the shop, and never, never again grieve her so terribly.

Jope paused at the door, rattling the knob in a nervous way, and said: "It's all along of *you*, Miss Kitty, that I goes back. If I ever takes to the 'song and dance,' it will be to the nutmegs and the thumpings as 'I do it."

Kitty's emotion resolved itself in a flood of tears, when, from the window, she saw Jope, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and his uncouth figure, slouching along with slow, uncertain steps. His ambition quenched, his ardor gone, he was turning back to his bondage. Poor boy! the tears

scarcely dried on his cheeks—his heart still swelling with disappointment and defeat, and yet, in the stimulus given to his better feeling, by his unselfish devotion to Kitty, there was a germ of progress which is possible even to the humblest mind. Much that is deleterious to the heart and fatal to morals is gathered in the unwholesome freedom of the streets, and the noxious atmosphere of those brilliantly-lighted halls, whence come, through the latticed doors, sounds of revelry and music, that draw with shrewdly-calculated *attractions*, and poison the germs of virtue in the young, as surely as the canker in the heart of the peach robs it of its bloom, and withers it prematurely; but whenever a boy is so fortunate as to be under the influence of a pure and innocent love—whenever in his innermost heart he has raised a shrine, whether it be to some fancied ideal, or to a girl whom he watches on her way to school, and adores secretly—that boy is hemmed about with safeguards, and is not apt to fall into serious mischief.

It is far easier to go forward than to go back. In the one instance, hope beckons with smiles, and whispers her honey-tongued *luring*. In the other discouragement clogs the weary steps, and hampers the energies of the mind. In the revulsion of feeling caused by Kitty's unlooked-for appearance Jopo was only painfully conscious of a deep sense of mortification and a dread of old Pitkin. Better impulses, though unsuspected by him,

were actively at work, and urged him to go on each time that his flagging courage prompted him to commit some act of desperation, rather than to give himself over to his persecutor. He reached the corner—a few steps more would bring him to the shop. He could see the window, just as he had arranged it the day before. He counted the mustard boxes, piled in pyramidal shape—the bottles of *parfait amour*, curaçoa, and anisette that lay so temptingly side by side—the olives, and pickles, and sardines. Oh! he had polished them off yesterday, and given an extra touch to the plate-glass window, just because he thought it would be for the last time; yet here he was again, coming back voluntarily, to deliver himself up. His hand went instinctively into his pocket—not a penny. He had put his savings into his outfit, and there was the red cravat crumpled up in that pocket. Oh! oh! oh! But a gentle touch fell upon his arm—a sweet smiling face looked into his—an angel voice spoke to him.

"Poor Jope! I know how hard it is; but you are doing what is right. You are a good, brave boy; I will always be your friend, dear Jope."

The face grew bright, the drooping figure was reanimated into fresh life; he could have faced the whole world unflinchingly, and snapped his fingers at fate. He walked unhesitatingly into the shop. Kitty was by his side. What had he to fear?

"You young rascal! so you have taken to running

away," cried Mr. Pitkin, as his eye fell upon the old print.

"Now, the most selfish person we ever met," says Leigh Hunt, "was upwards of a hundred, and had the glorious reputation of not being movable by anything or anybody." This old man was but a type of many other old men and women; and I am afraid that Mr. Pitkin belonged to the class. To him, Jope was Jope; an ugly appendage to his grocery—a pair of hands, a pair of eyes, a pair of feet, all exercised for a small stipend, paid grudgingly, but regularly, out of which just as much value received as could be extorted was taken in the way of night-work.

"Grandfather!" exclaimed Kitty reproachfully, "is this the way you keep your promise? Remember that you were to let things go just the same if I brought Jope back to you."

"Yes, and I've come along with Miss Kitty, sir; and I never would but for her. I've served you faithful, Mr. Pitkin, and you've paid me for it by inspection and nightly searchings as would be fit only for a thief. Now, sir, I've come back; but I won't be put upon. Whenever you drive me to desperation, I've got my feet to fall upon."

"What does the idiot say, Kitty?" cried the thoroughly exasperated old man. "What does he mean by throwing up his feet in my face?"

"Only, grandfather, that he has been very foolish, and

thought of joining a minstrel company. Pray, don't be too hard on him."

Mr. Pitkin was speechless; his jaw fell; his head protruded until his skinny neck was elongated like a turtle's, as he adjusted his spectacles, the better to view the monster; then, with cutting irony, he said, slowly emphasizing his words:

"So we have an artist among us!"

Kitty's hand was again on Jope's arm. "Don't mind, poor fellow! It will be all the better for you, if you don't mind now."

"I'll try, Miss Kitty," he answered in a disconsolate tone; "but it's all along of you. I'll try."

CHAPTER XV.

"GIFTS THAT GOD GIVES."



GOOD intentions are but too frequently abortive attempts of our higher instinct to assert its supremacy over the vacillating incompleteness of frail humanity, and failing, as we often do fail, in carrying them out, does but retard our progress toward the perfect-

tion to which we all naturally aspire. Were our actions always prompted by these first outbursts of our better, purer nature, how different would be the sum of our account with God!

Mrs. Parrott had just heard from John Maribel the details of his visit to Worleight. A sharp pain pierced her heart when he expatiated with honest admiration upon Agatha's winning manners, her charming cordiality, and her sweet interest in his darling.

"I am going up on Thursday, aunt, and Kitty has promised to go with me. Don't you think that she will be equal to the occasion? She carries herself like a princess. Many a royal lady might be glad of her beauty?"

"If we only knew what is best for her, John," answered Mrs. Parrott.

She would not break her faith with Agatha, yet she yearned to save the girl. In the conflict which was raging in her breast, the cry of duty grew loud over the contentling passion of her love for Agatha. Now, as ever before, she yielded to the dictates of that love. Her intentions were good; but these are a frail barrier only against the encroachment of influences strong in proportion as they act upon a nature biased by a ruling and absorbing passion.

John Maribel, unconscious of the struggle that was going on in Mrs. Parrott's mind, continued to talk to her concerning Kitty's proposed visit, and ended by asking

her to give her some hints about her toilette, and to send Nellie off at once for her, in order that they might consult together on so important a subject.

Mrs. Parrott deferred to all that John required of her, but with the same hard manner which had characterized her since her sojourn in his house. An hour later, Kitty came tripping in, sweet as

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable;
Elaine, the Blyx-maid of Astolat,"

2

She was in high spirits, eager to view this unknown world, which to her young imagination was so full of moving, living beauty—so bright with enchanting women and heroic men. Kitty was, as all pretty girls are, and should be, appreciative of her good looks, and fully aware of their value. She had never looked upon a glowing Titian, or the bright splendor of a Guido, she knew nothing of the ideal glories of the old Greeks; the fact is, she had as yet seen no beauty more perfect than her own. Her mirror showed her each day an image, fresh from the hands of God, delicate with the flesh-plata of youth and health, luxuriant with a wealth of life, and animated with a pure soul that looked out from the depths of her soft, tender eyes. What woman is so dull to the inspiration of the Beautiful as not to recognize it in herself when thus presented to her view? Mrs. Parrott looked at her as she

stood tossing up a rose, which she dexterously caught in her hand. The old lady had spent much of her life among the wonders of Italian art; and she watched this pretty study, seizing at once the artistic grace of the light, springing movements.

"Have you forgotten, Kitty, the important business before us? Have you forgotten that you are to go to Worleigh the day after to-morrow?"

"No, indeed, Aunt Parrott; I have thought of nothing else since it was decided that I should accept Mrs. Wilbraham's invitation."

"Well, then, my dear, have you fixed upon your toilette?"

"I shall wear my white muslin," answered Kitty. It is beautiful, aunt; not one of those stiff things, but soft and sheer, just like a floating cloud; and I have bought a lovely sash and a ribbon for my hair. What more do I want?"

"Nothing, my dear, except a bit of advice. A ride of ten miles in a buggy will not benefit a dress that looks like a cloud. You are to spend the whole day at Worleigh, and you will naturally want to look your best at dinner. Take your white muslin with you, and wear a lawn for the drive."

"Ah!" exclaimed Kitty, "that will do admirably. I was quite unhappy last night when I thought of my crumpled dress; for of course, after a ten miles' ride in John's

buggy, it could not be otherwise. Now my mind is quite free to enjoy myself!"

Mrs. Parrott rang her bell, and with a promptness as marvellous as that with which the slave of the lamp appeared to Aladdin, Nellie answered the summons. If she did not rise out of the floor, she came from the next nearest place, and that was from behind Mrs. Parrott's bedroom door.

"Nellie," said the old lady, "if I were not positively sure that you are not a subject of especial grace, and therefore not an organ for miraculous manifestation, I should say that your appearance was remarkable, if you were not listening from behind the door."

"And would I be listening, because I was behind the door? Couldn't you have left your hood on the veranda, and couldn't I be hanging it up on the peg?"

Kitty gave a clear, silvery laugh—a laugh that was not the least of her charming gifts.

"Oh, Nellie!" she said, "I am sure that Aunt Parrott is quite satisfied that curiosity has had nothing at all to do with your being behind the door."

"You are always carrying things off in that way, Miss Kitty," answered Nellie, with an accusing blush; "and I must say that I think it a mighty pleasant way."

"And I must say that age grants you neither wisdom nor good manners, Nellie dear," said Mrs. Parrott. "Go to the third drawer of my bureau and bring me the inland box which you will find there."

The box was brought; Mrs. Parrott opened it with a small silver key which hung on her bunch, and drew forth a bit of lace, rich with age, and exquisite of texture.

"Kitty," she said, "this is for you—a fragment only of what I once possessed, and if I have not parted with it before, it is because souvenirs, dear to my heart, cluster around it. It could not meet a happier destiny, my dear, than to shadow with its delicate arabesque pattern your round white throat."

"Thank you, dear Aunt Parrott," exclaimed Kitty, examining the lace which she had taken in her hand; "it is indeed very beautiful, but, I fear, far too valuable for my wearing."

"Vulgar eyes, my dear, would not esteem its value, or even suspect it. Accept it for the sake of that past which is mysteriously connected with the present—out of which memories come fresh and vivid when much else of the days that were has passed from my mind."

"I believe," answered Kitty, "that this lace has a story attached to it. Am I not right, dear Aunt Parrott, and am I taking too great a liberty in asking you to tell it to me?"

"It is quite natural that my words should have aroused your curiosity, and I am perfectly willing to tell you the story—for there is one, but I warn you that it is a sad one."

CHAPTER XVI.

"SHALL I TELL YOU WHY?"

LONG years ago, Kitty—years that seem like a dream to me now, so far are they separated from my life of to-day—I was a bride, young, attractive—can you believe it?—and, as I thought, beloved. We were in Venice, my husband and I—in that beautiful city of the sea, noted for its gay life—its marvels of art, still living in the sculptures of Tintoretto, in the knights of Giorgione, and the sumptuous beauties of Titian, who counted no tissues too precious, no jewels too costly, to relieve, not enhance, their charms. The Dorians and the Sforzas fostered with princely rewards the artists who created objects which simply conduced to their pleasure. Among the most beautiful of the arts thus encouraged was that of lace-making. The most superb tracings were used in the designs. They were copied from the Gothic, Saracenic, and Renaissance—exquisite wreaths and vases and scrolls of *cinqus cento*, all wrought out with wonderful skill. These costly relics of a past age are treasured in the old families as priceless heirlooms.

"I had been but a few weeks the occupant of one of the old palaces where everything breathed of a past, rich

with pomp and splendor—great with the wealth of its merchant princes and the glory of its men of genius. Sadly inharmonious with that marvellous past was the quiet city, loved by the Adriatic waves, mourning the dirge of its slow decay. I was standing on a balcony overlooking the water, watching the gondolas glide by, and wishing for the return of my husband, when I saw a woman stepping from one at the foot of the stairs. She sprang lightly up the marble steps, and before I could recover from my surprise she was at my side.

"Signora, come with me, I entreat you."

"The thrilling tone of agony in her voice, the earnest, imploring eyes, brought to my heart a conviction of urgent need for succor; and notwithstanding the imprudence of the step, I determined to go with her. I caught up a light scarf, threw it over my head, and followed her rapid footsteps.

"It was only after we were seated in the gondola that I observed that one of her hands was wrapped in her mantle, and, to my horror, I saw that it was stained with blood. The gathering twilight scarcely permitted me to discern her features; but I guessed that she was young; for there was about her the outward expression of emotion which belongs to those yet untried by grief. The impatience of youth manifested itself in her frantic entreaties to the gondolier to make greater speed. Any connected speech seemed impossible to her, and I was relieved when

the gondola touched ground. We entered the portal of a great, gloomy building, and as I followed her down a vast stone corridor, I became thoroughly frightened, and bitterly regretted having engaged in so wild an adventure. We entered a low room, which seemed to be a sort of ante-chamber leading to a larger apartment.

"'Come, come, Signora,' she whispered. 'You will not find him here.'

"A wild terror seized upon me. I caught her hand—alas! the bleeding hand; for she had thrown off her mantle—and a suppressed groan burst from her lips as the blood gushed forth afresh.

"'Ah! forgive me,' I cried, 'I have hurt you.'

"She had already torn a strip from her dress and was binding it around her hand. In all this she displayed a courage which at any other time would have won my sincere admiration. Then I thought only of my own peril; but the woman was holding aside the curtain which fell before the door, and by an irresistible impulse I obeyed the sign which she made me to enter the room.

"' *Senza Maria!*' she murmured, as she glided past me, and in an instant she was on her knees beside a low bed, on which an infant lay, tossing and moaning in the heat of fever. She kissed the flushed brow, the hot, parched lips, and then the little, thin limbs, again and again, with passionate tenderness, pouring out words of endearment, which met with no response from the little

sufferer—not even a look of recognition in the dark eyes, which seemed unnaturally large from the excessive emaciation of the face.

"A lamp hung from the ceiling shedding a dim light over this harrowing scene; and as I comprehended this woman's need, I thought less of myself, and began to realize the necessity of immediate action. My first impulse was to get a physician. The gondolier was still there, for I had told him to wait for me; but as I moved toward the door in order to execute my purpose, the afflicted woman sprang to her feet and barred my passage.

"'Merciful lady,' she cried, 'succor my child. I am starving—do you not see it?' and she held her ghastly, attenuated face close to mine. 'I am dying; I can no longer beg for her. Oh! I saw you give to blind Bianca in the market-place. I followed you, that I might know where to find you. Oh! gracious lady, take pity on my child!'

"'Let me go,' I said; 'I will send for a physician. There is no time to be lost.'

"I flew to the gondolier, and despatched him at once for a physician, giving him, at the same time, money to buy food and wine. Returning to the room, I found the woman prostrate beside the child. She had made her last effort, expended her last strength in asking charity for her. While I chafed her cold hands, I prayed as I had never prayed before. There are times in all of our lives

when we place ourselves directly at the footstool of God, and realize His sympathy with our needs. Faith is created in the human heart by a sense of human weakness; and at that moment, utterly thrown upon myself, I can comprehend, as I fear I have never since done, the comfort of God's presence.

"I spoke Italian just sufficiently to make myself understood; so I implored her to take courage, and to tell me in what way I could best help her.

"*'Signora,'* she answered, in tones scarce audible, 'I loved Angelo. For his sake I abandoned my father's house, and now!' she cried, raising her voice as she uncovered her wounded hand, 'he would have murdered me to-night. Ah! *Signora*, save my child!'

"With a horror which I cannot express I saw that she had exhausted her last strength. The ghastly features sharpened; the large eyes lost their light, and when a few moments later the physician came, there was but one who needed his care. The woman was dead.

"I took the child home with me. She was a mere infant. I carried her in my arms, and as I held her pressed to my bosom, something which I could not understand—a yearning which has never been satisfied, made me tenderly anxious for her; and from that moment I loved her as well as a woman can love a child which is not her own. When I undressed her, I found that bit of lace tucked away under her dress. A mother's love had placed it

there, and I divined the precaution which had prompted her to secrete it upon the child's person."

Mrs. Parrott paused, while Kitty sat with an expression of expectancy on her face; but the old lady was silent; she had finished her story.

"Not now, not now, my dear," she answered to Kitty's entreaty that she would go on. "I have told you the story of the lace."

There was something in Mrs. Parrott's tone which checked importunity in Kitty, for one of her nicest traits was her delicate tact. Tact is repellent of intrusive curiosity, as it is of other offensive failings, against which it is a better safeguard than even the highest degree of culture; for cultivation may exist without it, and it is just so much the less available for the absence of this quality.

Kitty, as she walked homeward, was thinking of Mrs. Parrott's strange and story, and wondering whether she would ever hear the sequel, when she became aware of footsteps directly behind her. She slackened her pace, hoping that they would outstrip her own; but no; they were, on the contrary, measured by them. Remembering John Mabel's warning, she became uncomfortable and nervous. The tall magnolia trees grew thickly just there, shadowing the road into gloom. The footsteps followed always, quicker or slower, as she slackened or increased her pace. At last, the suspense growing unbearable, she

turned abruptly, and found herself face to face with her unwelcome companion. He took off his hat to her with an air which at once set at rest her fears as to the safety of her purse and jewelry. No one could look less like a highwayman than did this mild-mannered personage in his shabby dress, which, however, failed to cover the fact of his being a gentleman.

"Excuse me," he said, "I know that I have been guilty of a riddens; but while I watched your graceful movements, I had no desire to speak to you, and yet I wished to inquire from you whether Dr. Maribel lives in this neighborhood."

"You have left his house behind you," answered Kitty; "the white cottage—his name is on the gate."

"Thank you," he answered absently, looking at Kitty in the meantime, and so earnestly that she colored under his glance and turned to continue on her way. "One moment," he urged; "I have heard that Dr. Maribel is charitable. Would he, think you, succor an unfortunate man?"

"His unflinching charity has retarded his fortune," she answered, "for he is far from being a rich man. Pray, accept this; I can well spare it, and you may not find Dr. Maribel at home."

The stranger drew back with a motion of haughty surprise. "You mistake me," he said; "the greatest charity is that which brings relief to a wounded heart. I had

reference to none other. Put back your purse, dear young lady; I am almost sorry that I cannot accept what you so graciously offer. Pardon me; but you speak warmly of Dr. Maribel. You know him, perhaps?"

"Know John Maribel!" exclaimed Kitty; "why, he is the dearest friend I have on earth!" A sudden brightening of the eye—a look which passed over her with eager scrutiny—betrayed an awakened interest in herself, and the impropriety of having entered into conversation with this stranger at once presented itself to her thought. With heightened color, she was turning from him, when he laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Pardon me once more," he said; "I would ask you one more question. Are you Catherine Featherstone?"

"No," answered Kitty, a possibility flashing through her mind, to which the changed, excited looks of the man seemed to give reason; "no; I am Kitty Pitkin, and I beg that you permit me to proceed on my way."

The stranger bowed dejectedly, saying: "A likeness may sometimes deceive."

Kitty turned once to look after him. He was slowly retracing his steps.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I SAW SWEET BEAUTY IN HER FACE."

DEAR John," said Kitty, as they sat talking in the little parlor behind the shop, "I want to tell you of my adventure."

"Your adventure, Kitty! Ah, you have been walking alone again; you have forgotten my warning."

"Not another word will I say!" she cried, "while that ugly frown disfigures your brow."

He took her hand between his own, with that gentle, familiar caress to which Kitty had been so long accustomed. Her intercourse with John Maribel was so guiltlessly innocent that, with the delicate sense of honor which guided all his actions, he took care that neither look nor manner should wake suspicion of the love for her which was daily growing stronger in his heart. He was far too generous to fetter her affections, and too fearful to risk the loss of the sweet, spontaneous devotion given to him as freely as the violet yields its perfume. Love is responsive to love. It leaps into life as Psyche was roused from her slumbers by the touch of Cupid's flower-

tipped arrow, and a woman's life (but really begins at that awakening. She then grows and expands into the perfect organization of womanhood—the fit complement that God conceived when he saw that man needed a helpmate. For this was John Maribel waiting in hope.

He kept the dear hand within his own and smiled; thus smoothing the ugly wrinkles which furrowed his brow.

"If I promise to be perfectly amiable and forgiving to you, dear, do not require too much forbearance from me toward any one who has had the temerity to offend you," he said.

"You go too fast, John," answered Kitty. "An adventure is not necessarily unpleasant; I don't know but that I was more sorry for the poor man than frightened at his strange manner."

"Kitty, you are tantalizing! Some impudent fellow has accosted you."

"I was coming from your house, John——"

"Alone?"

"I'm afraid that I was, John. I have often walked home alone. It was broad daylight; and really, John, don't you think that I am old enough to take care of myself?"

"You are old enough to be charmingly attractive; and I forbid—do you heed, Kitty—I forbid you to go about bewitching people."

The words were lightly spoken, to cover a sense of real

uneasiness and annoyance. Kitty was not deceived by them, and answered quite gravely:

"I promise you, dear John, that never again will I expose myself to the risk of being accosted by a stranger; or even to the chance of being politely questioned as I was to-day."

"Some one has questioned you, Kitty?"

"Yes; he wished to know where you lived, and whether you were charitable, and——"

"Committed the daring incivility of stopping an unprotected lady to ask a physician's address!" exclaimed John Maribel, "when he might have found it out by looking in the directory. Pray, what pretext did he allege for detaining you, after you had answered his question?"

"A very natural one. He wanted to find out who the bewitching young creature was; and, with a directness which was rather startling, asked me whether I was Catherine Featherstone. He evidently mistook me for that young lady, whoever she may be."

John let fall Kitty's hand; he was so thoroughly astonished, that for a moment speech was impossible. There was a glance of rapid retrospection. His thoughts went back to the night, long years ago, when he had found, in the dim, cold, death-chamber of Ethan Featherstone the little child whom he carried through the storm to the Red Tavern. Then, as ever afterwards, he had followed the instincts of his generous heart without troubling himself

about the mystery with which old Featherstone had chosen to surround her. Indeed, he grew to love her so fondly, and to find how much of his peace and happiness were centred in his guardianship, that he dreaded any revelation which might endanger his intimate relations with her, or change her trusting dependence upon him. Her allowance had been regularly remitted, and as regularly placed in the savings bank. He had worked all the more courageously for the dear thought that Kitty was to be a sharer in its fruits—all the more nobly for following out the divine precept, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

Kitty believed that grandfather Pitkin's affection for her had overcome his natural penuriousness, and for this reason her sweet gratitude was ever chastening the uprising of rebellious protests against the old man's selfish emotions. John Maribel was all the better satisfied that his share in her maintenance and education should remain unsuspected.

"John, dear John," cried Kitty, "what have I done?"

He recovered himself before answering, and then, taking her hand again, he said, soothingly:

"You cannot suppose that I blame you, dear; but I implore you, as you love me,"—his voice, in spite of his effort to maintain its usual tone, trembled with a new intonation—"to avoid in future the possibility of so unpleasant a *rencontre*. Villainy assumes many forms, and

the most insidious is often clothed in civil speech and insinuating manners."

"I cannot think, John," answered Kitty, "that the man's intentions were bad. Nothing in his person indicated vulgarity, and his manner, though somewhat excited, was neither obtrusive nor impertinent. I believe that he was bitterly disappointed at his mistake. He may be insane, poor man; and it was this idea which frightened me."

"Well," said John, rising, "I shall try to find out what the fellow wants. Don't think any more about him, Kitty. Remember that we go to Worleigh the day after to-morrow. You must carry your best looks thither. Good-night."

"John, I am sure that I have grieved you. Won't you kiss me, as you are used to do when you say good-night?"

He drew her to him for a moment; his lips lightly touched her brow; and, without a word, he turned and left the room.

Joep had been holding his horse; and, as John Maribel took the bridle out of his hand, the boy noticed his unusual pallor.

"I'm afraid the Doctor's took bad," he said to himself, as he went into the shop.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"GOOD-MORROW, GENTLE MISTRESS: WHERE AWAY?"

THE fair young day was smiling on hill and vale as John Maribel and Kitty emerged into the country, leaving behind them the town, sleeping in summer dulness. Oh! it was pleasant to travel with the golden hours between banks of flowers, bright-hued and fresh with dew; to look far away to the purple hills, and, nearer, at the waving fields of corn; to hear the hum of the brown bees among the morning-glories, and the song of the mocking-bird trilling out its mingled melody with exultant gladness. Kitty sat mute, allowing her soul its full communion with the sweetness of the summer morning.

"A crowd of hopes,
That sought to sow themselves like winged seeds
Born out of everything she heard and saw,
Flattered about her senses and her soul;
And vague visions, like fitful blasts of balm,
To one that travels quickly, made the air
Of Life delicious."

She had seldom been in the country—only once or twice with Dr. Maribel, when she was a child. This was all

new to her, a moving panorama lighted by sunshine and glowing with life. John Maribel watched her silent joy with unspoken delight; he saw but her, he felt that all the beauty of the summer day was but the harmony of sound and color, blending in exquisite touches with her loveliness. One hour like this is but a hint of that ecstatic enjoyment which we conceive through the faculty of imagination, with the aid of youth and hope. John Maribel had no such aids; for he was no longer a very young man, and any hallucination of the senses may seem out of keeping with the sobered judgment and experience of his ripe years, but his was one of those rare and beautiful natures which retain their capability of enjoyment, because they, perhaps, have failed to extract any very practical uses from the stern school-mistress Experience, but have rather fostered a confident faith in the possibility of human happiness. This possibility John Maribel saw in a future made bright by Kitty's love. He was thinking of this now, as he looked at her with the soft sunlight falling upon her, and her face glowing with health and enjoyment.

She suddenly turned to him and smiled. Oh! such a smile flashing from eyes and mouth—parting the carved lips and showing the small, regular teeth.

"I believe that you are having a dull ride, John. I have scarcely spoken a word to you," she said.

"People can be very happy without talking, Kitty. You remember that Claudio says: 'Silence is the per-

fectest herald of joy": I were but little happy, if I could say how much."

"I am glad to know that you have been enjoying your self," she said, archly; "but I believe my silent mood is over. Shall I be interrupting your pleasant reverie by talking?"

"I believe it is quite time that it was interrupted, Kitty. It was growing too pleasant."

Just then a clear, shrill cry echoed through the forest; and as they descended a hill into the lower ground, where the pasturage was good, they espied a black urdlin minding his calves.

"See them, John, scampering across the meadow. Oh! the pretty, dappled creatures," exclaimed Kitty.

The calves were, unfortunately, not the only objects of attention. Two women were approaching them, riding upon a dejected-looking mare, which seemed to be kept in an uncomfortable state of maternal solicitude by her youthful progeny, perseveringly bent upon getting what she could not conveniently give.

"John, John! they are going to stop," cried Kitty. "See, they are making signs to you."

It was only too true. Dr. Marshal had been recognized. There was no help for it. Old Mrs. Thom drew rein, threw back her sun-bonnet, and bade him "Good-morning."

"Well, how's times with you, Doctor?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Thom," answered John Maribel, "I believe that I have nothing to complain of just at this moment."

"I reckon you haint," she said, "riding along of as pretty a gal as I ever set eyes on."

"Kitty's scarlet cheeks must have enhanced her good looks; for the girl who hung on behind seemed absolutely petrified with admiration—so steadily did she gaze at her with her dilated blue eyes.

"I hope you are all well up in your neighborhood, Mrs. Thom," said John Maribel, hoping to divert her attention from Kitty.

"Only middling, Doctor. Fever's bin right sharp around, and Bill, he's down with ague; but father, he's mighty helped with them bitters you sent up. Since old Mr. Featherstone died, and its nigh on to eighteen years, you don't come much about Mapleton. The babies is all grown into likely gals and strapping young men. I s'pose you don't remember Dick Peck? Well, he's gone off to Californy; and Mary Elizabeth Downs, she's got married; and old Mother Beckwith, she got a fall going to meeting, and I heard say as how the doctor couldn't do her much good."

"Well, well," exclaimed John Maribel, knowing from past experience Mrs. Thom's prolixity in neighborhood gossip, "I'll promise to go to the first wedding; but you must excuse me now; I am anxious to get on."

"I reckon you'll have a wedding at home before long, if you hain't had one already; but I won't be a keeping of you. Good day to you both."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed Kitty, tears of vexation trembling in her eyes.

"What is it, dear? Are you really so greatly annoyed at the admiration of these poor country people? Divest Mrs. Thom's language of its homeliness, and you have a pretty, and, I am sure, a very sincere compliment. I mean about your being 'as pretty a gal as she ever set eyes on.'"

Kitty laughed, in spite of her annoyance.

"She is an odious old woman, John. I wonder that you should encourage her to talk."

"Such people," answered John Maribel, "have their aches and pains as well as their more opulent neighbors; and they are scrupulously honest about paying the doctor's fee."

"I really believed you incapable of courting the favor of old women for their money," laughed Kitty.

"Not altogether for that, dear; but I have never had the 'world as my confectionery,' therefore I have to look about me for my sweets; and will you believe me when I tell you that such people as Mrs. Thom sometimes furnish them?"

"I believe I don't quite understand you; but my irritation against her originated in the shock which she gave

to my enjoyment. The uncouth couple were so dreadfully out of keeping with this bright landscape, and——"

"Kitty," said John Maribel, "unkindness would be much more out of keeping with your sweet nature. These homely people possess many sterling qualities which dignify them into respectability. In the relations of wife and mother, they stand pre-eminent. They are industrious, honest, and dutiful in their conjugal relations, while their devotion to their children renders the self-abnegation consequent upon the exigencies of poverty almost sublime. 'Beauty is the mark which God sets upon virtue,' and these uncouth, simple people are not devoid of it. Such women as Mrs. Thorpe, Kitty, give soldiers to their country's need."

"I feel really ashamed of myself, John; but to be frank with you, I would never have discovered that beauty, 'which is the mark that God sets upon virtue,' without the aid of that moral insight which you seem to have. I believe that you have been endowed with the blessed gift of seeing with your moral sight, and this is so clear and just that you seek out treasures where other people only see vulgarity and ugliness. By the by, do you suppose that the old Mr. Featherstone, who died at Mapleton so many years ago, could have been in any way connected with the Catherine Featherstone for whom the mystic is stranger mistook me?"

John Maribel gave the horse a smart cut with the whip,

and, as the road was rough, this accelerated speed required that he should give undivided attention to his guidance. When proceeding at a more sober pace, he answered Kitty:

"Old Featherstone was a very rich man, dear. A close connection of his, in all probability, is a wealthy woman. I am speaking hypothetically, you understand. Do you think that she is to be envied because of her wealth?"

This question was the veriest platitude. No one knew better than did John Maribel that people were envied, and they always would be, for being richer than their neighbors. Yet he weakly yearned to hear Kitty say that she was indifferent to them. Riches would place so great a barrier between them.

"Were I rich, dear John," she replied, "you would never need to take money from poor Mrs. Thom."

This childlike reply brought its sweetness with it. In her thoughts she associated him with the generous impulses of her own truly noble nature. They were then entering the grounds of Worleigh. From out of the pure brightness of the past, childhood was waving her a last adieu; the portals of a new life were opening for her; and, when the great gates shut with jangling clang behind them, a sudden revulsion brought to John Maribel for a moment a positive sense of danger. He was casting his lot with others, who might aspire to her love, and who, in all likelihood, might have a better chance to win it. He

long remembered this summer morning on which his love gave to everything a new and tender significance—long remembered the swaying willow-branches which touched Kitty as she passed—the mellowed light under the arching trees—the waving grass—the moving breath of the perfumed air, and Kitty's hand resting so lovingly on his knee, as she leaned forward to get a better view of the grand, old house.

No lapse of time could ever obliterate the bright picture which was engraved on his heart, or dim the beauty of its coloring.

Kitty's face was beaming with delighted surprise as she exclaimed: "Dear John, how beautiful this is!"

It was a revelation of that other life which was dawning for them. Her eyes were turned away from him—he was adoring her.

CHAPTER XIX.

"HER WONDERFUL QUALITIES AND MILD BEHAVIOR."

AGATHA WILBRAHAM'S style was unimpeachable, her manners graceful and easy, her conversation marked by the happiest graces of expression. Whether she dealt in the brilliant and spark-

ling vivacity of the French, or the more rich and copious language of the Anglo-Saxon, she was equally felicitous, wielding to the best advantage the power given to but few—that of keeping up a constant interest in the minds of those whom she wished to propitiate. Her personal charms were on the wane. She was thin, and often pale and haggard from physical suffering; but the sparkling of her wit never failed, and the spell of her manner was perhaps increased by a certain languor which elicited sympathy. On this day—when Kitty was left entirely to her, when she could enjoy unrestrained the exquisite pleasure of her companionship, when she lavished upon her the tenderest caresses, and begrudged every moment that she was not in her presence—on this day she tasted a joy that was all the more alluring, because it was dangerous. She was intoxicated with the satisfaction of long yearning of that tender love which she had smothered in her heart for so many years, and which flamed out now, threatening to consume her prudence, and to mock the precautions which she had so carefully taken; but Agatha was an actress who needed no prompting in her part. She seldom forgot even the most subtle intricacies, and was always on her guard. In the short hours of that day she had indemnified herself for the cruel privation under which she had so long suffered, and the effort to keep her emotions under the control of her will was almost superhuman.

The mistakes of youth are but the erroneous deductions of inexperience. It is not, therefore, surprising that Kitty should have believed that she had reached the acme of human enjoyment, and that she should have given up herself, heart and soul, to the delusion of the hour. Dinner was over, and while the gentlemen resorted to the piazza to smoke, Agatha drew Kitty to a sofa near the window, and with consummate art beguiled from her the history of her simple life. She smiled when Kitty spoke of John Maribel with a manner not yet divorced from the innocence of childish frankness, and she was well satisfied when her practised eye failed to discover those signs which are the unmistakable evidences of an awakened heart.

When Gaston de Rousy stood leaning gracefully just within the window, holding a cigar daintily between his fingers, Agatha said, giving him a meaning glance: "Miss Pitkin has been charmingly entertaining, Gaston. You cannot think how much I have enjoyed her account of her life with Grandfather Pitkin and good Dr. Maribel."

"Miss Pitkin looks as if she had been brought up in a court. It is difficult to associate her with any other life than one of elegance and refinement," answered De Rousy.

Kitty blushed painfully; for the first time in her life she felt unreconciled to her simple, not to say homely, friends. The words of De Rousy had struck at the root of her contentment; the consciousness of inferiority of

position brought with it a sense of humiliation, and she wished—oh! with how much of girlish earnestness—that she had been born to the beautiful life which, she believed, had made Agatha's existence one long continuation of repeating pleasures—of ever-recurring happiness.

Gaston threw away his cigar, and took a chair beside her. Poor Kitty grew painfully confused under the somewhat bold glance of his eyes. He was really admiring her lovely features, and took no trouble to conceal the fact.

No one knew better than De Roussy how to use the advantages of person and manner for which he was distinguished; and while he allowed his eyes a somewhat daring avowal, his words were kept within the bounds of the most respectful politeness. He enjoyed immensely talking to her; while she, all unconsciously, was revealing to him graces of mind and a freshness of heart which made him reluctant to give up an enjoyment which was rarely attainable in the world in which he lived. He was therefore but ill pleased when Agatha joined them.

"Dr. Maribel tells me that you sing, Miss Pitkin," she said. "pray, give me the pleasure of listening to you."

"My voice," replied Kitty, simply, "is, I believe, a good one, but altogether uncultivated. You will, I am sure, excuse me, Mrs. Wilbraham, although it would give me pleasure to oblige you."

With the tact of true politeness Agatha gave up the point, understanding that unwilling compliance is fatal to good execution. "I will sing to you instead, dear," she said, laying her hand for an instant on Kitty's beautiful hair. "Gaston, will you place my music-book on the piano and turn to *Ombra Leggera*? You have never heard an opera, Miss Pitham?" she added; "you have then great enjoyment in store. Come and stand beside me while I sing."

Seating herself at the piano, she commenced the graceful rippling measure, executing with marvellous taste the conception of Meyerbeer, and performing with the utmost delicacy and skill the very difficult task of accompanist, making the instrument subservient to the music, and blending the two into a perfect and delightful harmony: never forgetting the reciprocal interest which should exist between the poet and composer, or that the voice and the instrument are mutually dependent upon each other. An educated taste would at once have detected the talent of the singer and an excellent method which enabled her to seize the meaning of the master and to do full justice to his inspirations. Nature leaves to art the perfecting of her work, and Agatha had cultivated with ardor the gift bestowed upon her. How beseechingly she uttered those words:

"*Ne t'en va pas! Ne t'en va pas!*"

How tenderly!

*"Pour te séduire,
Je veux sourire,
Je veux chanter."*

Kitty was spell-bound. Her eyes grew soft and tender; a flush suffused her cheek; her small, white hands were clasped before her, and her tall figure was slightly bent forward, as she listened in wrapt delight. Gaston de Roucy scarcely heeded the music. He was contemplating with passionate enjoyment the fresh beauty of the young girl; and John Maribel stood by the window taking in all the scene—reading the hard lesson which was each moment becoming painer to him. What else could he see in the looks of the man before him, so far his superior—he thought—in those graces which are acquired only by contact with a polite world?

Col Covington, Wilbraham's nearest neighbor, a gentleman of cultivation and high social position, was standing beside him.

"Doctor," he said, "I believe I never so truly enjoy myself as I do when I am listening to Mrs. Wilbraham sing. That full, rich voice seems scarcely to belong to one so very frail and slight as she is."

"Yes," answered John Maribel, absently, "she certainly looks frail; but, Colonel, is it fancy, or does there really exist a likeness between Mrs. Wilbraham and

Kitty? Fill out Mrs. Wilbraham's face—give her Kitty's golden locks—and the resemblance would be striking."

"We sometimes see these freaks of nature," said Col. Covington; "but in this instance she has certainly improved upon her model. Miss Pitkin is, and always will be, a handsomer woman than Mrs. Wilbraham; and now that they have separated, the resemblance weakens; for, however alike in feature, the expression of the clear, tender eyes of Miss Pitkin is in striking contrast to the restless orbs of Mrs. Wilbraham."

"Kitty," said John Maribel—she had joined them, and they had walked out on the terrace—"my holiday is well-nigh spent. Are you ready to go home?"

Can we blame the young creature?

"Such a noise of life

Swarmed in the golden present; such a voice
Called to her from the years to come, and such
Length of bright horizon"

shown in larbent serenity far over the alluring, untrav-elled future—can we blame her that her heart was pruned at thought of going back to the shop? As she hesitated for a moment to reply—only a moment, for she was too truly loyal to swerve from her duty—Col. Covington, with the privilege of age, laughingly expressed his envy at Dr. Maribel's good fortune in having the pleasure of riding *solo-à-solo* with so charming a companion.


"And now," he continued, "I have a request to proffer. Will you, Doctor, prevail upon Miss Pitkin to make us a visit? Mrs. Covington, I am sure, is most anxious to know her, and will accuse me of a want of proper gallantry should I fail to take to her a promise from you to give us the pleasure at an early day."

"With all my heart, Colonel," answered John Maribel, reading something like entreaty in Kitty's eyes; "I ask nothing better. But my patients sadly interfere with my liberty, and I cannot fix the time for our visit. You may depend that we will not postpone it a day longer than we can help."

A few moments later Kitty stood ready for her departure. Agatha was saying some parting words to her; and as she turned to accept De Roucy's escort to the buggy, she bent forward and kissed her. It was all done so rapidly that Kitty had scarcely time for astonishment. De Roucy handed her to the buggy—the old-fashioned, ridiculous-looking vehicle which she had hitherto looked upon as a delightful conveyance. He arranged her dress carefully about the dainty feet, and then, with a courtly bow, a scarcely perceptible pressure of the hand, he withdrew, while John Maribel took his place beside her.

CHAPTER XX.

"OUR OLD AND FAITHFUL FRIEND."

OL. COVINGTON was ever an honored and a welcome guest at Workhigh. His commanding social qualities, winning authority for his uncommon colloquial powers and elegant manners, would have distinguished him even in court circles. Here he was not only admired, but sincerely beloved, and the children of his oldest and dearest friend, beyond all others, appreciated the noble traits of his character as well as the constancy and firmness of his long-tryed friendship. With a lofty and martial air he bore his seventy years. His clear, blue eye still kindled with the fire of his brilliant intellect, when, as he warmed on the subject in hand, his opinions, which were decidedly conservative, found expression in language remarkable for its perspicuity and force. Men gathered around him in every public place of meeting; and whether his quiet humor moved them to merriment, or his earnest words chained their attention, he was ever the centre of every circle, courteous to all, but particularly urbane in his manner to those not belonging to his own class. A gentleman of the *ancien régime*, his home was emphatically the home of his friends. The old Colonel

was never so sincerely gratified as while dispensing the liberal and elegant hospitality for which he was so distinguished; and he occupied his hale old age in superintending his plantation, in beautifying his grounds, and attending to those domestic vocations which were congenial to his taste. The white hair, which had lost none of its luxuriance, crowned him with the venerableness of age without indications of its apparent infirmities, while his teeth—the absence of which warns old age of decay—were still remarkable for their perfectness. His florid complexion—inherited from his Saxon ancestry—added to his appearance of robust health. This boon, so precious to one who had passed the allotted span of man's existence, might, in a great measure, have been attributed to the extreme simplicity of his habits, which bore a striking analogy to the primitive customs of the first settlers.

Happy is he who can look back over seventy years of time and feel that his name is inseparably connected with deeds of noble charity and acts of disinterested friendship. Happy is the father whose gray hairs are made sacred by the love and veneration of children; brighter than a saint's aureole in the halo of a noble life!

Miss Eleanor W. Graham had been confined to her couch during the greater part of the day with headache. She had come out, pale and languid, and stood now talking to her old friend. Well did she know that he carried a heart peculiarly susceptible of her sorrows and anxieties.

For years they had maintained an intimate and unreserved intercourse, and, during the minority of Hugh, he had acted as his guardian. It was so natural for Miss Eleanor to unburden herself unreservedly to him of her troubles that he was scarcely astonished, at her expressed uneasiness.

"Would that Hugh were here," she said; "I am at a loss how to advise Agatha; and even had I the tonerity to do so, would she, thank you, bend her capricious will to reasons suggested by prudence?"

"My dear Eleanor," answered Col. Covington, "Hugh's absence at this juncture is most unfortunate. While I acknowledge Mrs. Wilbraham's superiority as a woman of the world, and do homage to her rare accomplishments, I nevertheless deplore the mistake which Hugh has made. I fear that his marital relations are insecure; that is, that there is a total want of congeniality between them, which he, poor fellow, has not yet divined, and which God knows to what evils it may lead in its train. We old people are apt to judge from our own arbitrary standpoint; we belong to a past, which was rigid in its condemnation of whatever smirched the ermine of wifely duty and obedience. Morality to-day takes a wider scope. I fear it is no longer kept within the bounds prescribed by the just regard for high rectitude. Women in our day were emulous of excellence in housewifery, and seldom went beyond the precincts of home to seek pleasure, much

less admiration. We must be indulgent, Eleanor. The tide of progress is leading to a different course of things, and much that we cordially disapprove is buoyed up to the surface of the world's lenient judgment. I have learned somewhat to mistrust my own judgment, so fatally have I erred in the management of my affairs."

"I will not have you thus blame yourself, dear, old friend," replied Miss Eleanor. "Your proud rectitude has only made you a little too indulgent towards those to whom you have so conspicuously displayed a generosity, which seems not to have repressed their ingratitude. You have always taken men at your own valuation. You ought to know what mischief lurks in the simplicity of such honesty."

"Aye! I ought to know, my good friend—I ought to know that it is not safe to judge men from too high a standpoint. As a general thing, their moral organization will not bear the test of complete trust in its integrity. It is but just to ourselves to reserve our confidence until a man has proved himself worthy of its trust. It is wisest to look upon a man's intentions towards one's self with a certain defiance, reserving always sincere approbation for whatever he may possess that is excellent in heart or mind, which may be developed on better acquaintance; but how woefully have I failed to put this fine morality to practice. Good-bye, Eleanor. Cheer up; things are seldom so bad that they can't be remedied."

"Unfortunately," replied Miss Eleanor, "we cannot always apply the remedy when we find one. Now, Mr de Roumy's absence would greatly conduce to my peace of mind."

Col. Covington looked grave as he answered:

"Your jealousy for Hugh is carrying you too far, Eleanor. Surely there is nothing extraordinary in Mrs. Wilbraham's liking for her cousin."

"No," said Miss Eleanor, coloring, "nothing at all in *that*; but I am, as you say, over-jealous for Hugh. A poor, doating, old sister, who has all her life made to herself an idol, and fallen down, and worshipped it, I am now reaping the reward of those who do such things. You know how proudly I looked forward to his majority. You know the dreams of ambition I have entertained for him; and there's no wonder, when poor father—from the time that I made Hugh his first trousers—was always saying that his head was the most wonderful development of the highest order of faculties and,——Ah, me!"

"Yes, yes, dear Eleanor," answered the old gentleman, with a movement of slight impatience—men have so little tolerance of doating mothers and sisters over boyish phenomena—"but I know, with your firm faith, it will not be difficult to extract exalted lessons from the pages of your past life, and through the alchemy of patience you may perhaps attain that peace which is the essence of earthly happiness."

Miss Eleanor watched him as he rode down the avenue on his thoroughbred, that knew from long service that his good master would permit him to go at a gait no faster than a gentle pace.

"Ah, me!" she thought, "there is no question but that our own acts have a great deal to do with our misfortunes, but that they fall more crushingly upon some than upon others, none can deny. It is consoling to think, that as we are loved, so are we chastened."

CHAPTER XXI.

"TAKE UP THE CORSE, SIRS."

THE street lamps glimmered pale beneath a clear, starlit sky as John Maribel and Kitty reached town. People sat upon door-steps and beneath verandas, while windows were set wide open to catch the fickle breeze, which stirred the catalpa leaves, and brought the perfume of the far-off woods to those who had no time to go forth into country lanes and byways, to seek it.

The confectionery shops were filled with people, who sat around tables, under festoons of colored paper garlanded

with flea, drinking sherbets and eating cream, while the weary dry-goods clerk across the street, sweltering in the gas-light shop, looked vacantly away from the old lady upon whom he was waiting to the more fortunate human beings who possessed the means of enjoyment, which, at that moment, were out of his reach. The grocer's clerk, next door, was scarcely less despondent than his neighbor, as he carried in the boxes and rolled in the barrels, which were to be set out again the next morning for the benefit of the passer-by, who might be tempted by the smell of mackerel or by the sight of liquefied butter. The close, hot town—the night of the shops—the noise and bustle of the streets—the flaring gas-light—everything which reminded her of the life to which she was going back, when they turned into Broad street, was hateful to Kitty.

"John," said she, in a tone of alarm, "the shop-window has not been lighted. Something is amiss with grandfather. Ah! there is John. Look at his face, John, look at his face!"

John was standing in the full glare of the street-lamp, and his face was plainly visible to them. As Kitty sprang from the buggy, he clutched her arm, saying:

"You mustn't go in, Miss Kitty. Doctor, don't let her go."

She broke away from John's detaining, hand and rushed into the shop. The door of the parlor was locked. Her frantic efforts to open it were futile. An object of grief

and terror hard to depict, Jope stood in the middle of the floor, repeating, "You mustn't go in, Miss Kitty. Doctor, don't let her go."

"Explain yourself," said John Maribel, taking him roughly by the arm, "what do you mean by refusing to open that door? Give me the key at once."

"Remember Doctor, if any harm comes to Miss Kitty, that it's you as will be the cause. I tell you, she oughtn't to go in there."

Dr. Maribel had taken the key from his reluctant hand, and, in a moment, they stood within the dark room.

"Grandfather, grandfather, where are you?" cried Kitty, in a voice shrill with anxiety.

There was no response—no sound, save the scraping of the match which John Maribel's trembling hand failed to ignite. Even this slight delay was a relief, for he guessed too surely what would meet their eyes. Another effort to obtain a light was more successful, and, as the match ignited, giving out its sputtering blueish flame, Kitty caught sight of the old man's prostrate form. She flew to his side, and, kneeling beside him, exclaimed in tones of tender entreaty:

"How could you lie here, grandfather, when your bed was so near? You have wanted me—you have missed your Kitty. I have come back to you. Do you hear, dear grandfather? I have come back. Ah! John, he does not answer."

"No, dear," he replied, his practised eye having at once detected the hopelessness of all human success, "grandfather has reached the end of his long journey."

She turned and looked into John Maribel's face—he was kneeling close beside her—with a gaze of puzzled, agonized inquiry in her eyes.

"Kitty, darling, perhaps I ought to have told you that for some time grandfather has been threatened with this sudden catastrophe."

She became so white that he put his arm about her; the trembling figure was drawn close to his bosom, and her arms went up around his neck. For a moment John Maribel forgot the dead old man—forgot the awful presence which made the indulgence of human passion a sacrilege. The throbbing form in his arms was all the world to him. The intoxication that came over his senses well nigh, in its delirious joy, caused him to forget the noble resolve which had hitherto been inviolate. Joy's sobriety aroused him from his transient delirium. The boy stood leaning against the frame of the door, his eyes fixed upon Kitty, and his face quivering. His grief was altogether in sympathy with hers. He scarcely gave a thought to the old man, or, if he did, it was with a sense of relief that his bondage was over. To have spared Kitty this sorrow, he would have been willing to serve old Pinkin to the end of his life. Each plaint of hers went to his heart with cutting misery; but the shop-door had been left open, and

people, with the peculiar instinct which prompts curiosity even on occasions of sorrow and death, began to crowd in.

"Kitty," said John Maribel, "you must not stay here."

She rose at once—her grief was so touching in its gentleness. "No," she said, "I must not stay here."

Kitty went into the room where she had slept for so many years in little Martha's bed. Nothing had been changed since then. The white dimity curtain at the window, with the knotted fringe, the valance around the bed, the blue and pink wax-candles on the mantel-shelf, and the great Bible, the hymn-book, and "Baxter's Saints' Rest" on the little table at the head of the bed. She had seen them a thousand times before, but not as now. The halo of association gave to each detail a tender meaning. She recalled events of her childhood long since forgotten—words spoken to her by the old people—which came out vividly now in the train of memory. How gentle they had always been to her; how loving in their own simple ways. Oh! in this world would she ever again find a love like theirs? Even grandfather, hard and unbending as he was to others, for her had always a smile or a tender word. She remembered with shameful remorse that on that very day she had swerved from her duty to these humble friends. Death with ruthless hand tears the veil from before our eyes, and shows us ourselves as we are. We dare not, in the presence of his awful majesty, trick ourselves out in self-deceitful illusions; we

do not save ourselves with the notion of our own self-importance. No; when he is there we cany behold the frail tenure of humanity. The ignoble calculations of the ambitious workling, the evanescent pleasure of indulged passion, the soothing charm of beauty, the satisfaction of money-getting, the triumphs of science, or art, or action—all pale before the reality of this grim reminder of their short-lived triumphs.

Kitty forgot the delights of Worleigh, the fascinations of Agatha, the charm of Claxton de Ramsey's conversation, in the one thought of her recent shortcoming in her duty to the poor old man. It was a relief to her sad thoughts when John opened the door and beckoned to her.

"Come with me, dear Kitty," he whispered; "you need rest and refreshment."

She put her hand into his with childlike confidence. It was so natural to accept the love which he gave, and never to question her right to take it. The beauty of John Maribel's devotion was that it was so little obtrusive that it could only have been divined by the delicate instinct of a responsive feeling. The noble characteristics of a truly ingenious nature are so intricately interwoven in the commonplace motives and actions of life that we may go on for years without discovering them. We are satisfied, at least, that we are dealing with a thoroughly safe and worthy person, without troubling ourselves to look for the hidden springs of his action. Just as we see

a sunset, and do not take in its multi-form varieties of color, its marvellous changes from burning glow into the mellowed paling of violet light; just as we walk through God's domain, half blind to the beauty which unfolds at every step—so do we go on our way, unheeding moral excellence, until our obtuseness is quickened by having it palpably brought before our senses by some unexpected trial, some event which brings it to light and calls it into action.

Hundreds of people know John Maribel, and with the greater portion of them he was the "best fellow in the world;" a little too free with his money, a little loose about business which concerned only his own welfare, notorious for forgetting to send bills to people in difficulties, and having a charity practice which was a positive folly. Deductions from these facts were perhaps not more erroneous than the world's judgment usually is. A man's life will, in the end, generally tell its own tale.

As he crossed the threshold of his home that night with Kitty, he experienced the terrible trial of conflict between passion and honor which so sorely shakes the soul. He would have taken her in his arms and comforted her; he would have asked her to lean upon his great love; but he felt that it would have been ungenerous, even cowardly, thus to profit by her helplessness.

"No," he thought, "Kitty shall have fair play. I must run my chance with the others."

CHAPTER XXII.

"OH, GO YOU FAR?"



WEEK after Mr. Pitkin's death, a man, travel-worn and evidently weary, was slowly making his way along a secluded country road, stopping from time to time, and looking about him with an uneasy and undecided manner, which plainly indicated that he was uncertain of his course. His perplexity had brought him to the determination that he had better retrace his steps to the mill, which was just below in the valley, when the slow grinding of wheels through the sand, and the crack of a whip, fell upon his ear. An ox-cart soon appeared in sight, and walking by the side of the oxen was a tall old countryman, who brought out with his deep sonorous voice the *gee* and *whoa* which encouraged the patient animals to greater speed.

"Will you be so kind as to direct me to the nearest house where I may obtain rest and refreshment?" said the stranger, walking along by his side.

The old man raised his hat and passed his blue cotton handkerchief over his brow, examining in the meantime his interlocutor with keen scrutiny.

"You may as well go along with me," he said, seemingly satisfied; "my house is just on the rise of the next hill. It's the nearest hereabout and I reckon my old woman has got breakfast ready."

"I am really quite grateful for the prospect of food and rest," answered the stranger. "I am exhausted from a long walk over the country."

"Might you be a preacher?" asked the old man.

"Oh no! would that I were half so worthy of your esteem, as are those self-denying men. You may rest assured, however, that I will not abuse your hospitality, or prove unworthy of the confidence which you show in inviting me to your house."

"He that watereth, shall be watered also himself," said the old man. "I never turned a stranger from my door, or refused to break bread with man. You are welcome to such as I have to offer."

They had turned into the lane that led to the stable, which stood in rear of the house. The latter was a tall, narrow structure, with a piazza in front, and chimneys built of brick on the outside. A well-house stood on the left, and a garden filled with old-fashioned flowers and fragrant herbs evidenced careful culture; with a thriving orchard of peach and apple trees bordered the lane. The oxen were driven into the yard, where the cart was to be unloaded. While the yokes were being removed from their necks, and the tired animals turned into the pasture,

the stranger sat down at the larn-door, and his eye wandered over the goodly landscape spread out in field and meadow beneath him. The expression on his face was that of one recalling a familiar scene, rather than of awakened pleasure in something which was strange and new to him. He was aroused from his reverie by the voice of the old man inviting him to enter the house.

"Susan," he said, as they entered the room, where the good woman was laying the table for breakfast, "I have brought a stranger home with me. I hope you have got breakfast ready, for he is tired and hungry. Where's Abby?"

She shook hands with the stranger, and placed a chair for him, before she answered: "Abby has gone to the spring, father. You know you always want fresh water when you come in."

At that moment the guest, who was sitting near the open window, saw a young girl bearing a small water-pail on her head and stepping lightly through the grass wet with dew, holding her skirts above her ankles with so natural a grace that he was attracted to observe her more closely when she came in, after having placed the pail on the water-shelf, which was at the end of the piazza, and held buckets, gourd, and a tin wash-basin for the convenience of the family.

She was undoubtedly a handsome girl: tall, lithe, and well-shaped. Her black velvety eyes were, perhaps, a

little bold—her complexion, brown, with the sun-tan, was rich with the bloom of perfect health, and the firm round outlines of her figure were scarcely disguised by the plain fashion of her calico dress. Hair of a reddish brown hue contrasted well with the eyes, and though the lips were too full, and her mouth somewhat large, one forgot this defect when she laughed, displaying her perfect white teeth. The stranger rose and bowed to her, with a manner which marked him at once as one who was familiar with the usages of a polite world. The girl was instinctively conscious of his homage, and her heightened color testified to her gratification.

"That's my daughter," said the old man, "the only one of six, which the Lord has spared to me."

"You are in a great measure compensated," said the stranger, "by the possession of a daughter whose charms are well calculated to fill your heart with pride."

"She's well enough," the father replied, not displeased with the stranger's praise of her beauty, and looking at her with a glance of unwonted tenderness, as she moved about setting the dishes on the table.

Hillside farm belonged to Miss Eleanor Witherham, and for many years had been leased to Mark Blackwell, who had been an overseer for her father, and by him highly esteemed for his upright character and the zeal with which he discharged his duties. He was a tall, powerfully built man, rugged as the gnarled oak, and as unbend-

ing in his probity. His white hair was combed back from a high furrowed forehead, and heavy grizzled brows overshadowed eyes searching in their glance and capable of a terrible severity when kindled by anger. Deep lines were traced around his firm mouth, and the square heavy jaw characterized his face with a resolute firmness. His religion was the gloomy faith of the Puritan, in which God's justice overrules His mercy, and the thunder of His wrath is ever menacing the erring sinner. His simple code of morality was taken from the teachings of Solomon, and it was his boast that he had ever walked uprightly before God and man. Though hard of speech and unflinching in his condemnation of wrong, yet in his own way he was a tender husband, and with a weakness inconsistent, but by no means rare, he permitted his handsome daughter to have her own way in spite of his severe reproofs backed by the authority of the wise man.

When they had seated themselves around the table, he crossed his large brown hands reverently before him, and, with bowed head and subdued tone, asked a blessing over those gifts for which in his heart he was earnestly thankful. With a hospitality characteristic of country people, he pressed the stranger to partake of the excellent breakfast, and, when they had risen from table, he assured him that he would be glad of his company and that they could furnish him a bed, should he feel disposed to stay until the next day.

"I am heartily obliged to you, Mr. Blackwell, but if you will permit me to sit for a couple of hours under the shade of your piazza, I think I shall be sufficiently rested to proceed on my way," answered the stranger.

"May I ask where you are journeying to?" said Blackwell.

"To the old Featherstone place. It can be no great distance from here."

"What, you are going there!" exclaimed Blackwell. "It's a ruin—house and garden; and the place has a bad reputation. The niggers won't go by there after sundown."

"I suppose the desolation of the place has engendered superstitious fears. I must confess that, since my brief residence there, I have been disturbed with no other ghosts than those conferred by memories attached to the place. I know something of the sad story of the family whose home it once was."

"May I be so bold as to ask your name, sir?" said Blackwell. "I have lived about here right on to thirty years, and I know most of the families in this and the next county."

"I have not the slightest objection to giving you my name—indeed, I believe I have been guilty of a discourtesy in not having done so before. It is James Fulkney."

Blackwell pondered a moment, looked searching at

Mr. Paltney, and then asked: "May you be related to the Featherstones?"

"By the by," said Mr. Paltney, evading the question, "do you happen, my friends, to know the circumstances attending the death of old Mr. Featherstone? They were, I think, of a sad and peculiar nature."

"Yes," answered Blackwell, "I remember there was a good deal of talk when he came back; and, instead of going to the old place, he stopped at Magleton and bought Stonyhill. Trouble had changed him into a miserly, crippled old man, and when he was taken down, so that he couldn't leave his bed, he sent for Dr. Maribat, and he attended on him till he died. The leanest snow-storm as ever fell in this country—and you know it's a rare thing to have snow at all—came on the day that he died. I heard say, that just at dusk a woman was seen by old Uriah Thom—who was pushing along with a load of wood going down the hill from the house, and that she disappeared all of a sudden, and nothing more was ever seen or heard of her. I always believe, for my part, that Uriah had his jig along, and his eyes wasn't to be trusted. However this may be, it happened that when Dr. Maribat went to see the old man, just about dark, he found him dead, and a child sitting by the bed. I had it from Tim Perkins, who drove the stage, that Dr. Maribat went to the Red Tavern with the child, and took her to town that night."

"And the child has lived with him ever since?"

"I know nothing about that; leastways, as to what became of the child. I am pretty sure, however, that she's not living with Dr. Maribel. I have been to his house after him for my old woman, and I see but a poor old cripple there, as he has supported this many years. The Doctor was up at Worleigh the other day. You can see the chimneys of the house from here—just look through those trees."

Mr. Pultney's eyes wandered over the wooded hills and undulating fields, but he turned away with a sigh, and seemed indisposed for further conversation.

Blackwell cast a curious glance upon him as he seated himself in the shadow of the climbing rose-vine. The man was evidently a prey to sorrow, and he was won to sympathy, in spite of his usually guarded indulgence in a sentiment, which he held to be trencherous, in some measure, to severn judgment. He took his hoe and rake, and went off to his vegetables. As he drew up the earth about the squash-hills, his thoughts centred upon the one absorbing joy of his life—Abby—the child of his old age—the wayward spoiled darling, who every day of her life outraged his ideas of maiden propriety and went in the face of his stern precepts, laughing him out of his anger and winning him to yield to her desires. No sooner did he comply with a caprice, than he repented him bitterly of his weakness; but this repentance was barren of fruit.

Abby had her own way. With secret satisfaction, Mark Blackwell had watched Perry Deane's growing attachment for the girl. From his point of view, he was an excellent match for his daughter. Sober, industrious, and frugal, a skilled workman and a God-fearing man—what more could he ask for in a son-in-law? Married to a man like Perry, Abby would become a domestic wife and the vagaries of youth would gradually yield to the duties which marriage would develop. It would be monstrously unnatural for a father to judge his only daughter otherwise than leniently—at least, until she had outraged his love and confidence; and now, as Blackwell went on with his work, he sang, in a low deep voice, "A charge to keep I have," thinking the while of Abby, and persistently shutting his eyes to those defects of character, which were so evident that few in the country round failed to see them, and, with proverbial charity, to prophesy the result of their unchecked indulgence.

At that very moment, Abby was at the spring, at the foot of the hill, her eyes glowing with gratified vanity as she looked at a ring with a ruby in the setting, which Gaston du Ruany was urging her to accept. His gun and game-bag were laid aside, and he stood leaning against a tree, his eyes fixed upon her with that bold admiration which savored of disrespect.

"Ah! why thank me for so poor a bauble? I only

gave it to you to cause ~~you~~ ~~somebody~~ to think of me. I'm afraid you need a reminder, Abby."

"I don't see why you say that," she answered. "I can't help thinking, even when they oughtn't to. I reckon I'd not come down here again. Perry will not like it. You know that I am as good as promised to him."

"Poh! exclaimed De Rousy, "do you suppose that middle-aged carpenter cares half as much for you as I do?"

"I don't know ~~how~~ much you care for me," she answered, giving him a shy, coquettish glance, and then casting her eyes down in feigned bashfulness.

"Don't you?" he replied, coming temptingly near her round waist and fresh-colored cheek. "Don't you?" he said again in a tone which caused her instinctively to draw away from him; for, coquettish as she was—vain and light and unstable, she as yet was proof against any undue familiarity, and would have heartily resented the kiss which De Rousy evidently had intended to impress on her coral lips.

She was flattered at the attentions of this fine gentleman. She admired his handsome person, and prized his well-chosen jewelry and handsome attire. She was not proof against his presents, or irresistible to hisattery; but she had been brought up in a strict school. Virtue, among the class to which her parents belonged, was so

highly esteemed that any deviation from chastity was visited with fatal condemnation.

Abby, with no very fixed principles of her own, was perhaps influenced by a fear of consequences, and this fear proved a safeguard to her.

Like many other women, she risked the loss of a true man's love for the frippery attentions of a soulless libertine.

Abby filled her bucket from the gushing spring, and, as she poised it on her head, Gaston thought how in other hands she might reap gold where models were sought for by painter and sculptor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHERE HIDES HE THE WHOLE?"

HERRY had promised Abby to be at home an hour earlier than usual; so he left off work at sunset. As he walked briskly along, he heard his name shouted by a familiar voice, and, stopping to ascertain whence it came, he perceived to his great astonishment that it proceeded from Jope, who was progressing slowly across the meadow which separated the estate of Woolough

from Hillside. Perry could scarcely refrain from laughing aloud at sight of the boy.

He rode a tall, lean horse, and he was perched on the top of a pair of saddle-bags which contained his worldly possessions. The jaunty hat and flaming neck-tie had again been assumed, and the soles of his new shoes were conspicuously visible as his legs, supported by the distended saddle-bags, stood out at right angles from the horse.

"How are you, Mr. Deane?" he cried with a jocular air, as he drew rein beside Perry. "You see that I am on the wing; and you will also notice, sir, that I'm in the best of spirits. Old Pitkin has acted handsome by me, and made up for the nightly scorchings and the nut-megs. I didn't expect it, as how should I, when he never let me know but that he thought me the worse of the worst? There's nothing that scorches up the good in a man, sir, like suspicion; and if old Pitkin had gone on a tapping of me and a watching me, well, I'd 'a got use' to the idea, and maybe turned thief; but he's acted handsome, and left me a clear fifty. I kinder think he was making up his account with the Lord, and he just settled for t'is extra work he got out of me."

Perry was walking by the side of the horse, his eyes cast down and his features working convulsively. Jope's ridiculous figure—his assumption of the air of a well-to-do man—his supreme self-satisfaction, were so provocative of

laughter, that Perry with difficulty refrained from its indulgence.

"You know my folks live at Hillside, just over there."

"No, I didn't," answered Perry. "Are they your kinsfolk?"

"To be sure, Mr. Blackwell is my mother's own brother. I haven't seen them this long while, because of a little difficulty betwixt me and my uncle. To tell you the truth, Mr. Deane, I have an inward sort of a feeling about meeting Uncle Mark. I ran away from him, and I never as much as took the trouble to ask where I went to. He called me a gallows-bird, and flung Solomon at me as I ran through the gate. I had as well say that the ox-whip was in his hand, and I daren't go back for fear of it."

"It makes all the difference in the world, Jope," said Perry, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "when a runaway returns to his home with a good coat to his back and money in his purse. Money 'makes all doctrines plain and clear.'"

"Well," answered Jope, "I reckon forty-five dollars of hard-earned cash, and a character, will do the thing for me."

By this time they had approached the house, and Mrs. Blackwell—who was standing on the piazza—espied the traveller.

"Abby," she cried, "there's some one coming with

Perry. Your eyes are better than mine; see if you can make out who it is."

Abby had undergone a complete transformation. Her plain calico had been replaced by a flaunting pink mashu, which was made in unsuccessful imitation of the prevailing fashion. A ribbon confined her hair, and a set of cheap jewelry completed the vulgarity of her appearance. She wore Gaston de Roussy's ring on her finger.

Her mother gave her a startled look. "Abby," she said, in a deprecatory tone, "I am real sorry you bought that dress, and I can't say that I like the make of it. Your white mashu looks beautiful. I ironed it myself to-day, thinking you would put it on. There's a good girl; go before father comes and take off that pink thing."

"I've worn that white dress until I'm fairly sick of it; so I don't mean to take this off. Why, mother, there's Jope!" she exclaimed, running out to meet her cousin.

Abby thought, as she shook hands with him, that time had scarcely improved his looks or his manners. The truth was that the poor fellow was a no little tribulation as to his welcome from his dreaded aunt, and Mrs. Blackwell, seeing this, put her arm about his shoulders, and said scottlingly,

"What is past, is past, Jope. Your uncle is kinder than you think. Although you haven't heard from us this long time, he has had news of you, and knows that you are honest and hard-working."

This was indeed consoling to the boy, and he placed his saddle-bags on the floor with the confident air of a man who is conscious of possessing the means of insuring a welcome.

Perry had gone up to his little room under the roof to change his working clothes for the suit of black broad cloth, which had done him service for many a year. As he brushed out his luxuriant beard, and gave a finishing touch to his cravat, he heard the old farmer's voice, raised in tones of anger. He had just come in from the barn, and, as his eye fell upon Abby, his ire burst full bounds.

"What's this!" he cried; "muslin and ribbons, gewgaws and furbelows! Where did you get that flimsy, dainty thing, Abby?"

"I paid my own money for it, father," she answered. "It's hard I can't do as I please with my ownings."

As usual, Blackwell took refuge with Solomon.

"'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.' Eo, Perry!" he exclaimed, as the young man came down the stairs. "You'll agree with me that them furbelows and fixens don't look right."

Perry felt the justice of the old man's remark. In his heart, he deplored Abby's taste for showy finery; and more than once had he attempted a gentle remonstrance. Now, as his eye took in the details of her costume, he discovered the ring. It replaced the simple gold circlet, which he had given her. The crimson cheeks and embar-

ressed manner of the girl conveyed little comfort to him, and, in a dejected tone, he said:

"We had better be going, Abby, if we expect to get to Searing's by dark."

"I've been ready this hour; but I've half a mind not to go," she said.

"Never fret about what father says, dear," whispered the indulgent mother. "You know he's old fashioned in his ideas, and our church don't approve of too much dressing. Go along with Perry."

She watched them as they walked side by side down the box-bordered path. They passed out by a wicket into a narrow lane between the waves of the standing corn. The landscape lay all before them—the sweet west wind came laden with fragrance, caught as it passed through forest dells and across the fields of corn, and orchards laden with ripening fruit. She watched them, her old heart growing young in sympathy and foolishly tender towards the wayward girl. The glaring pink dress softened in tone until, as it passed from view, it was scarcely pinker than the rose-tinged clouds tinted by the lingering sun-rays. Her heart exulted in the thought that, in all the country side, there was no maiden who could compare in beauty with her daughter.

The bats had come out from beneath the eaves, the fire-flies flitted over the beds of thyme, and balm, and rosemary, the distant hooting of an owl caused the hens to

rest uneasy on their perches, and the cows returned lowing to the pasture after the milking. A still, clear night was wrapping the world in shadows.

"I reckon, wife," said the old man, "they have taken the nigh way by the chapel."

"Yes," she answered, "and it will be seven o'clock by the time they get to Searing's. Have you seen Jojo?"

"Who?"

"Why, Jojo Perkins, your own sister's son. Where can he be, that you haven't seen him?"

"Here, aunt," said a voice, proceeding from around the corner of the house. At the same time Jojo came forward, with a hesitating, embarrassed manner.

"Run away again, eh?" cried the old man.

"No, I haven't, sir," answered the boy. "I rode out of town on a hired horse, as I am able to pay for."

"Then you haven't come back upon me?"

"No, sir; him as I served, though hard and full of suspicion and searchings, has done the handsome thing by me. I've got money in my purse, and needn't be beholden to no man."

"That's right," said Blackwell, "every young man's ambition ought to be to gain his own independence. You are right welcome, nephew. I'm willing to shake hands, and let bygones be bygones."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WHO GAVE IT YOU?"

THEY passed silently under the cone-dropping pines through a path scarcely defined, so thickly was it covered by the shaggy needles, and, on the rise of a gradual slope, stood the chapel, gleaming white in the gray dusk. A low paling, half covered by Cherokee roses, inclosed the graveyard, and tall columns marking the resting places of the wealthy rose above the humbler slabs and head-tablets. The night air was perfumed by the oleanders about the graves. No sound disturbed the stillness, save the croaking of the frogs in the creek swamp. Abby and Perry slackened their pace, as on the broad gravelled walk leading from the gate to the chapel they saw a man slowly walking, who was softly singing to himself. Neither the tune nor song they knew; but the touching pathos of the tones stirred their hearts, and the melody, in the hush of the gloaming, rose sweet and solemn from amid the sleeping dead. They did not know that, as he raised his eyes to the star-streaked heaven, the words, in a language unknown to them, were addressed to her who is the mother of Christ; they did not know that this *Ave* was the creation of a great master, and that its melody had floated through

the dim aisles and lofty naves of grand old cathedrals in far-off lands across the sea. To them it was an evening hymn, sweeter than anything that they had ever heard; and they stood clasping each other's hands, listening until the last notes died away.

The singer had opened the gate, and stood in the road before he perceived them.

"Good-evening, sir," said Perry; "we were on our way to a neighbor's. You will excuse us for having lingered to listen to your singing."

"You find it strange, perhaps, to hear me singing an *Ave Maria* among the good Methodists who sleep here?"

"I am but a poor scholar," answered Perry, "and the differences of creed have always struck me as a perversion of God's design. Religion belongs to Him—creeds are the work of men. Your *Ave Maria*, sir, can make little difference to those who lie there. Pray, excuse me, I am perhaps over-bold in expressing an opinion."

"Not at all, my friend. The wrestling matches among religious disputants have left us, upon many points, in a state of embarrassing doubt and confusion, and your idea of a universal belief—a unanimity of creed—is sublime, because, as you say, it seems more in accordance with God's design—more in harmony with perfectness; but I am detaining you—my way lies in the opposite direction. Good-evening."

"Perry," exclaimed Abby, "I wish we hadn't come

this way. What can a man want prowling about a graveyard at this hour?"

"He may have some one of his family buried here. He may have lost some one whom he loved. I can't think of anything more terrible, except to lose faith in one who is dear to us—to know that the woman whom we trusted is not acting fairly by us."

"What are you talking about? Who is not acting fair, Perry?" she asked.

He caught her hand, and put his finger on the ruby ring—it shone bright and red in the clear starlight.

"Did *I* give you that?" he said, in a tone of repressed anger. "Can a poor fellow like me afford to give his sweetheart a ring that cost what that did? I know a real stone when I see it."

"Suppose you do," she answered, flippantly. "I don't see, because the stone is real, why I couldn't have come by it properly; and I don't see what right you have to say anything about it, or to make yourself disagreeable because I have a ruby ring on my finger."

"It's not because you have a ruby ring on your finger, Abby, that I feel hurt. It is because you are not open with me, and that you have put aside my poor little gift to wear one far too much so me for a carpenter's wife."

"I'm not *that* yet," she cried, petulantly.

"Ah! Abby," said the poor fellow, "would you break with me for so paltry a matter? Is my love worth so little

that you can cast it off like that? You have given me the right to speak plainly to you, and you can satisfy me now by a little candor and honesty."

The girl was driven hard; she possessed no very strong principle of truth, and her voluble nature at once sought the quickest way to extricate herself from her difficulty. The temptation was strong upon her, and she yielded.

"Miss Eleanor has always been fond of me," she said; it was well that the darkness hid her crimson cheeks, "and it's not the first keep sake that she's given me."

"Why did you not say so, at once? Ah! Ah! you might have spared me so much pain," Perry said, putting his arm around her waist. "It wasn't kind, dear. An humble man like me is apt to be jealous of his love. I won't have another man's eyes taking what's my own."

"Nonsense, Perry," she said, with a laugh, "don't you be making yourself miserable for nothing."

She raised up her face to him and he kissed her. The true, honest heart of the man was grieved at its own injustice. He would have humbled himself to the earth before this girl whom he loved, and whom he thought he had injured by suspicion, and he promised himself—and at that moment he thought that such a thing was possible—never again to think ill of her, and she, with a saucy laugh, called him "a dear old fellow."

The vast, radiant world was around them—the soft, delicious night grew brighter and brighter as the moon rose

above the horizon—nature smiled serenely upon them as they walked on towards the glimmering lights that warned them of their approach to the Searings. The man would have been happy to linger in the cool, fresh solitude with his love.

"The moon shines bright: in such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise,"

The girl was thinking of the pleasure awaiting her—longing to take her place in the dance where she would reign queen of the rustic gathering.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THIS NIGHT HE MAKES A SUPPER."



WE will enter the rustic gates with Perry and Abby, for the lively scene is well calculated to arouse a desire to witness the progress of festivities, which, though simple in detail, are not lacking in the elements of enjoyment. We will accept the hearty invitation of Mr. Searag, and mingle with those simple country folk, entering into their unrestrained merriment and savoring the zest of remarks, which, if lacking in the polish of refine-

ment, at least carry the weight of sincerity which often becomes pointed personality, and elicits, at the expense of a deal of good-natured embarrassment, loud shouts of laughter which are as exhilarating as champagne. We will promise the reader in good time to follow the mysterious gentleman, who, in a country burying-ground, where most of those who rested there had died in the simple faith of the Methodist, was singing a hymn to the Virgin with faith as deep as was ever that of holy saint or suffering martyr.

The yard was brilliantly illuminated with the light of resinous pine-knots, which burned on elevated stands covered with earth, and which were replenished from piles of the wood placed ready at hand. This duty was performed by negroes, whose black faces shone with high good-humor and enjoyment, for no race is more keenly alive to cheerful captivation. Give the negro a fiddle or a banjo, with a modicum of meat and drink, and he is as happy as a king, if the happiness of a king is not a palpable paradox.

Mr. Searing's house was constructed upon no particular architectural design, everything about it seeming to have been a suggestion rather of utility or convenience. Two large rooms were separated by a spacious hall; and shed-rooms, with roof sloping from the main house, afforded sleeping accommodation for the younger members of the family. A wide piazza ran along the front; and immense

chimney, composed of rough stones found in the neighboring hills, and put together without any attempt at regularity of surface, while they suggested the idea of warmth and comfort, were neither symmetrical in form nor creditable to the skill of the builder. These chimney-places were now filled with freshly gathered pine and cedar boughs. Upon the whitewashed walls of the rooms wooden sconces were nailed, highly ornamented with cut paper and holding tallow candles. Chairs and benches were ranged for the accommodation of the elder portion of the company, while the well-scrubbed floors were sanded, ready for the dancers. The hall had been cleared of the heterogeneous collection of horns, guns, fishing-rods, saddles, and other accoutrements which usually hung there. These had been transferred to the front piazza, perhaps for the especial entertainment of the men who had collected there, and who seemed so intent upon their examination as to be somewhat oblivious of their duty towards the girls, who, in Swiss muslin and pink and blue and green sash ribbons, were gathered in clusters about the rooms like so many butterflys, waiting the first scrap of the violin, to flutter away with their beaux.

One of the shed-rooms had been allotted as a dressing-room for the girls. Many of them lived at a distance and had brought their dresses with them; so that the spectacle, as one after another took possession of the wash-square looking glass, was curious as affording those phases

of human vanity which, perhaps, are never brought out more clearly than in woman nature thrown into immediate juxtaposition and clashing in rivalry. It was a notable fact that the plainest girls kept their place before the glass the longest time, and seemed never to grow weary of looking at themselves—arranging their curls—putting on the hly white—turning their heads from side to side to get a view of the back hair, and appealing to every one to tell them whether the flowers were properly adjusted. And, oh, dear! could they see the powder—were they really sure that they couldn't? Such rustling of stiff petticoats—such creaking of new shoes—such fluttering of riddles—such confusion of tongues; and then such an avalanche of kisses when Abby came in to lay aside her shawl.

"I can declare, Abby, if you haven't got on the very dress I was dying to buy—and made up so stylish; and your hair is done up beautifull!—Lal! you've got a new ring," said the occupant of the glass.

"Let's see, let's see!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"A real gold ring; and such a stone! Hold it to the light, Susan Moore. Did you ever see a thing glitter so? I suppose you won't mind telling where you got it," said a tall, freckle-faced girl of the piny wood type; "the n as good looking as you don't get such things."

"Manners go before good looks, Jane Uzzle, and as you haven't got one, you might try to pick up the

other," answered Abby, pulling on her ring and leaving the room.

"The spiteful, stuck-up thing!" exclaimed Miss Uzzle. "If I haven't a mind to tell what I know."

"Tell us, Jane!" exclaimed the girls, "do tell us."

"No, no, I won't have any scandal," said pretty Patty Searing, coming into the room. "There goes the waste, the boys are all waiting; so be off with you."

None enough, the fiddle struck up a reel, and the tune electrified the tardy dancers; even Miss Uzzle forgot to be spiteful, and made one "sput curl" less than she had intended, in her haste to get "on the floor."

And now the fun commenced in earnest. The long reel was formed, all the girls on one side and the men on the other. The rustic beaux were smart in stiff shirt-collars and gay cravats—their hair was parted in accurate lines, front and back, and oiled, and frizzed in so kind a way that it was only a wonder that the girls did not fall in love with them then and there. Their shoes were polished to the last degree, and their feet went into the first position.

"Hands around!" was shouted by the negro fiddler, and then away they went around and around, while the gay music and the tapping of the musicians' feet beating time gave a lively impetus to the gayety. "Down the middle!" Here was an opportunity to display grace and skill in executing "steps." The lady turned the gentle-

met, and the gentleman turned the ladies, and then they turned each other, and thus until they reached the bottom of the reel, and then a wild gallop, and back to places, and around again. Was there ever so life-inspiring a dance as the Virginia reel? The music grew higher, the rhythm more racker, the fiddlers wagged their heads and beat the floor with their feet, while the old people pressed forward to see the dancers, applauding whenever some extra pigeon-wing was cut, or some young lady displayed unusual grace and lightness in her movements. Even the stout Perry partook of the reigning hilarity, and joined in the dance with Patty Searing as a partner. And so two hours were on until the supper room was thrown open; and then what a rush! How everybody crowded to the table, and how they admired the greaticed cakes ornamented with sprigs of cedar—how the young girls sipped over whipped cream and custards, and could hardly be prevailed upon to take a slice of ham or turkey, while the old portion of the company sat down to crisp roast pig, and then passed their plates until the turkeys were nothing but skeletons, and the blackniggers miniature caverned. Cups of steaming coffee were passed from hand to hand, and slices of light bread were consumed in quick succession. Everybody was satisfied—the candles were guttering in the sockets of the candlesticks—the fires had gone down on the stoves, the girls were laughing and chattering, while they searched for shawls and bonnets, and the young

men, profiting by their absence, put a quid of tobacco in their mouths, or took a draft at a pipe; then the merry "good-byes," as some mounted on horseback, in more than one instance riding double, while others went away in buggies or wagons.

Perry and Abby were among the last to leave. Abby leaned on Perry's arm a little more tenderly, perhaps, as a sort of compensation to him for the great amount of flattery which she had done that night. They reached home just as the cock in the barn yard heralded the dawn, and when they parted at the foot of the stairs, Perry took Abby in his arms and kissed her. "Trust me, Abby," he said, "to love you as well as I can ever love a woman."

She cried a little as she took off her pink dress, and made a remorseful catalogue of her shortcomings, intending, before she went to sleep, to say her prayers, with an idea which was a faint and undefined yearning growing out of human necessity for higher aid, that it was the right thing to do when people are feeling not exactly happy. Abby was very tired and forgot the prayers. She fell asleep to dream that she was being married to Gaston de Roussy, in a white satin dress, with ruby rings on all of her fingers.

CHAPTER XXVI

"RICH ONLY TO BE WRETCHED."

THE stranger, who was no other than James Pultney, after parting from Abby and Perry, turned into a forest path leading down to the creek which supplied Seering's mill. He crossed the rude bridge, scarcely heeding the swift, dark water rushing forward beneath the black shadows of overhanging branches, to tumble in mimic uproar over the dam, the feathery spray silencing in the white moon-rays. Across the creek the path grew wider and finally emerged into a solitary and unfrequented road leading to a house so densely shaded that it was scarcely visible to those who might chance to pass that way.

The gate was surmounted by stone lions; but the ivy had woven fantastically around the formidable monsters, binding their sharp claws and hiding their hideous fangs beneath its glossy leaves. No sign of life came from out of the deep shadow that rested on the ruinous house. After several efforts, Mr Pultney succeeded in opening the rusty iron gate. It clanged behind him, awaking strange echoes from out of the dreary solitude. The

avenue leading to the house was overgrown with rank, tangled weeds. A damp odor of decay rose up from the earth—from out of the dense and luxuriant growth the perfume of woodbine and cape jessamine mingled with the rich breath of the oleander. It was a wilderness of shrubs and flowers, through which the moon-rays scarcely penetrated, and where snakes and lizards shared, with the loathsome toad, an undisturbed security. Overturned vases, green with mould, lay beside the dry basin of a fountain, now half filled with earth, which no arched the poisonous vine that embraced with its interlacing tendrils the forlorn marble swan, whose open mouth and dilated eyes seemed to appeal, with touching despair, to the profound solitude which reigned supreme over this desolate spot. The house, solidly built of brick, had evidently been the residence of a gentleman, but years of abandonment and neglect had done their work upon the more perishable parts of the structure. Some of the shutters had fallen away, while others hung by one hinge, ready to join their companions in the mouldy dampness below. The mortar had, in many places, dropped from between the bricks, and the crevices were filled with moss and lichens, that fed upon the moisture and mildew which clung to the walls.

Mr. Piltney passed around the house and entered it through the back door. The hall was wide and lofty, and doors of oak opened from the apartments on both sides.

He turned the lock of one on the right, and entered a room which bore a striking contrast with the ruin and maddness of the rest of the mansion. A thick carpet covered the floor, paintings hung on the walls, books were everywhere, in the book-cases, on the tables, and even on chairs and sofas—just where the reader happened to have been sitting while reading. A piano or organ stood between the high windows, and treasures of music in richly bound folios were piled beside it. A lamp burned on the table in the centre of the room, which held writing materials and sheets of manuscript. Mr. Pultney threw open the window and stood looking out on the garden, where the moonlight was making weird shadows and the night birds were flapping their dusky wings, as they reeled through the air. His face, white and worn, bore the marks of that travail of the soul which furrows cheek and brow into premature age; but it was touchingly interesting in its serene melancholy, and dignified in the lofty nobility of its expression. His reverie was interrupted by the entrance of a woman, wearing the stiff, white muslin cap peculiar to the French *bonne*. Her dark eyes were small and bright, her complexion brown, with a healthy tinge on the cheek, and her teeth very white and regular. The hair, which showed from beneath her cap, was streaked with gray, and the lines about the mouth and forehead were strongly defined. Her manner was confident and slightly patronizing to her master; just as an earnest

practical nature will domineer over one which is vacillating in purpose. She had long held the post of sole servant to him, and managed as she pleased the simple details of his *ménage*.

"Ah! Mr Paltney," she said, "come away from that window. There's nothing but ruin and decay to look upon. I have brought you your tea in the majolica cup, and here are the biscuits that you like."

"My good Ursule," he answered, "how did you know that I prefer drinking out of the majolica cup?"

"How do I know what music to place uppermost ready at your hand, but that, for all these years that I have served you, I have learned to read your wants and to know what most pleases you?"

He smiled—a smile that illumined his face with its radiance, lending to it a beauty caught from the flashes of inspiration which come with the gifts of genius—a beauty linked to goodness—inseparable from singleness of heart.

"*Bon Dieu!*" exclaimed the woman, clasping her hands and looking curiously at him, "one would say that you had been with the angels to-night, out there in the gloomy forest."

"I have been to my mother's grave—doubtless her pure spirit was with me. At any rate, my own soul felt that communion with hers which convinces me of its spirituality. Ah! man is great even in the knowledge of his

own misery. He may be crushed by it; but he rises up immortal!"

"*Bien !* ' hear I hn now ! I do not understand, and yet I know that his words are grand and beautiful ;" thus murmured Ursule, as she set his tea on a small table before him. " Drink now, while it is hot, and I will tell you of the visitors who enue here to-day."

" Visitors !" exclaimed Mr. Pultney. " Ursule, have I not warned you that I will not have my privacy broken upon ?"

" Listen," she answered ; " they came from the forest on the other side" pointing in the direction of Worleigh

" a beautiful *d-moiselle* and an old gentleman. I was walking near the spring house where the water runs from the old stone trough into the pool. I heard the tramp of horses and then saw them coming. There are no fences to keep out intruders, and they rode straight to the spring. You may imagine how surprised they were at seeing me. The gentleman might have been her father ; but I saw no resemblance between them. He excused himself for having trespassed on the privacy of the grounds, and said that for so many years it had been abandoned that now it was looked upon almost as common property. I told him that my master had lately settled here—that he came from abroad, and that I had left my country to follow him—that he never saw visitors, and seldom went beyond the grounds. Was I right, ch ? They asked no questions,

and while I handed to the *démouille* the gourd of water for which she had asked me, I looked at her beautiful young face, and I was sorry when she rode away, smiting her thanks, and I thought that I had never seen so graceful a figure, or a riding-habit that fitted so perfectly."

"You are not apt to grow enthusiastic, Ursule, over strangers. This young girl must be fair indeed."

"As fair," she answered, "as the lily there, in the hand of Our Blessed Mother"—pointing to Overbeck's "Virgin with the Lily." "Her eyes are dark and soft, and the long curls of her hair that fell on her shoulders have that golden sheen which the old painters gave to the angels."

She spoke in French, and from close intercourse with her master and a ready faculty of imitation, she had acquired a manner of expression unusual in one of her station. Her ideas were taken, in a great measure, from the objects by which, for so many years, she had been surrounded. Dusting Madonnas and Angels, Bacchantes and Fauns; handling the treasures of art, which her master had collected, she had become familiar with them as household furniture. She knew the *genre* pictures of Breugel and Teniers—the exquisite pastorals of Cuyp—the charming heads of Greuze, and she was never surprised when called from her kitchen to admire a rare miniature—a piece of old carving, or an engraving. She did

not always understand why she should admire them, or comprehend her master's enthusiasm; but she listened all the same, and grew to love the treasures committed to her care.

Ursula had taken away the majestic cup and closed the door. After sitting for a few moments wrapt in thought, Mr. Pultney lighted a cigar and walked through the glass door into the desolate garden. He paced to and fro, the tangled grass, wet with the heavy dew, hampering his feet, and the white moonlight flickering on the wild luxuriance of trailing rose-vines interwoven with clematis and wisteria—with honeysuckle and the rosy trumpets of lignum bearing down with their weight the half-fallen arbors. Beyond, the pines, tall and sombre, moaned their eternal dirge. It came like sudden waves of sound surging through the forest, swelling into full cadence, then dying away in lingering echo. The place was weird and melancholy, and every nook and corner of the old garden was associated with memories dear to Mr. Pultney's heart. Ursula's song had ceased in the kitchen, the frogs croaked from the damp, dark places around the old spring-house, and the night was growing chill as, at last, he entered the house.

From an old *escriture* he took out a diary which was secured under a lock, and, seating himself by the table, he opened it, turning page after page until he reached nearly the middle of the book, where the writing was

closer and the substance something more than a mere record of events. On page fifty-six was written, at the beginning of the first line, "Frances, August 23d."

CHAPTER XXVII

"I FIND NOT MYSELF DISPOSED TO SLEEP."



RANCES, August 23d. She is here—Frances has come. Have I done fairly by my mother in thus deceiving her? No, I am perfectly aware of the leading motive of my mind—perfectly aware that I am giving way to a weak indulgence of my passion. I do not even question my conscience, or attempt to justify my conduct. No casuistry can convince me that I have acted wisely or prudently in bringing Frances here; but I love her, and, with dauntless heart and scheming brain, I will work to accomplish my end.

"How admirably she played her part this morning, saluting my mother in a manner so perfectly in keeping with her dependent position and, seemingly, so absorbed in her attendance on my sister Grace that she did not notice my presence, until I was formally presented to her; and yet

she managed, with one glance, to set my heart beating and to intoxicate me with the joy which fills my soul whenever I am in her presence.

"To-day, for one moment, we met in the hall—a pressure of the hand—a glance from her deep, luminous eyes, and she was gone. I went into the library and sat for hours, living off of that look—dreaming away the time, until my father's voice aroused me, and I saw him standing in the door, his riding whip in hand and a bitter smile curving his lip.

"*'I congratulate you, sir,'* he said. *'A young man is fortunate indeed, when he possesses a temperament so peculiarly fitted to the enjoyment of ease and idleness. It is happy for you, sir, that at the outset of life you are not called upon to exert yourself to obtain your daily bread. You have familiarized yourself with luxury until you quite forget to whom you owe the means of its indulgence.'*

"Stung to the quick, I rose to my feet and answered hotly: *'There is no danger, sir, of my forgetting what I owe to your bounty. You have given me the education of a gentleman; but better would it have been had you apprenticed me to a carpenter or shoemaker. That, at least, I would have had a means of earning my daily bread.'*

"*'Your speech is as absurd as your conduct,'* he said, with galling contempt. *'You are your mother's own son,*

and likely to be as useful in all practical matters as she is.'

"He turned and walked away, as he had done many times before, leaving me a prey to that futile exasperation which spent itself in cursing my destiny and wishing that I had been born with a nature which might have been shaped and moulded to his own ideas, instead of the sensitive imaginative temperament, rendered antagonistic to him by hereditary predispositions, which totally unfit me for the career that he has chosen for me.

"I went to my mother, and poured my complaint in to her willing ear. I am always sure to find the solace of sympathy with her."

Here he turned over several pages, his eye passing carelessly over them, until it rested on the date of September 23th.

"She has the tact and knowledge of a woman of the world, and yet Frances is only nineteen years old! My father evidently admires her, while she thoroughly understands him. It will be no very difficult matter for Frances to obtain an influence over him, which will result in a voluntary concession, from habit, of those arbitrary ideas which he entertains with regard to my future prospects. The propellers to the motive of his thoughts and the choice of his actions are commonplace enough. Frances divined them at once.

"I am tantalized beyond endurance! My life is spent

in agonies of jealousy, in ecstasies of joy and repentance, when I can snatch her to my heart for a moment and press my lips to hers.

"Oct. 30.—It is decided that I am to go to the law school. I have but one thought, and that is, that I am to be separated from Frances. I have suggested to her a dozen wild and imprudent alternatives to avoid going; but her clear and decided refusal to listen to me has overcome my purpose of attempting to resist my father's will.

" 'Do not pretend to love me, Oscar,' she said to me this morning, 'and allow yourself thus unwilling to make the sacrifice of your inclination to my good?'

"Her speech stung into life my consciousness of what I owed to her. I am going, but I take no heart in the work before me."

How he turned page after page—his face grew paler—his fingers twitched convulsively, and he paused at a date one year later.

"I have married Frances! My father seems to be laboring under a strange infatuation. His contempt for me seems to increase daily, and he takes little trouble to conceal it. Sometimes I think—oh, horrible thought! that his ready consent to my marriage was given as an alternative between the sacrifice of his ambitious plans for his only son and his separation from Frances. She rules the household. Happy for my poor mother, she is far too ailing to feel keenly the mortification of my father's

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neglect of her. Oh, the misery of an awakening such as mine! Frances does not love me. I know it now.

"My father, essentially a close and prudent man, is growing alarmed at her extravagance. Like all women who, having been brought up within the limits of poverty and under its hard restrictions, find themselves suddenly in possession of an ample purse, she gives unbridled liberty to her luxurious tastes. Nothing seems too rich—nothing too costly for her. I hear projects of journeying to the gay capitals of Europe, where she may display her personal charms and accomplishments.

"I dare not tell my mother of my misery, still less would I acquaint her with the real history of Frances—that is, where and how I found her."

Then followed mere jottings down from time to time—no regular dates until March 24th.

"To-day my mother was buried—the narrowest of her life are over. (She is at rest. Can I find consolation in this—can I accustom myself to the thought of her absence—will God forgive the angry grief which rages in my heart? My love for my mother was a sacred, beautiful religion. All the good in me is traceable to her influence and to her guidance. She has cheered my energies—she has stimulated my flagging spirit. She knew my fatal weakness—my utter inability to battle against the tide which is overwhelming me."

The worn, thin face grew beautiful in expression as he

raised it from the diary to look at a portrait which hung on the opposite wall. The wroght devotion might have emanated from the face of a worshipper before the shrine of his favorite saint. The poor, trembling fingers turned the pages mechanically; he seemed to be pursuing some train of thought which diverted him from his immediate purpose, when, by that strange fatality which we call accident, his eye fell upon the date of September 12th. In a moment he was brought back to the sense of misery which this retrospection had conjured out of the past.

"Midnight. A child is born—a girl, How lovely Frances looked in her paller. how softly her dark eyes turned upon the tiny babe which lay at her side.

"'Oscar,' she said, in a tone so sweet and low that my foolish heart gave a great throb of joy, 'you will wish to call her Catherine after your mother.'

"I stooped love and all my ill concerness returning all the past forgotten—I kissed her and whispered, 'Thank you, Frances; thank you, my darling! How happy you have made me to-night?'

"Poor, foolish, trusting heart! How soon has your joy died out—how can I transform the cruel agony of your grief into language?"

Baden, July 31st, was the next date.

"Frances has lost immensely. She has played with the recklessness which characterizes all her actions. My father is furious at the loss of his money; and he has

peremptorily ordered her to make ready for immediate departure.

"At sea, August 16th. Nothing around me but the wide reach of water—the eternal motion of the restless waves—nothing in my heart but despair and bitter shame. I am fleeing from the horror of my life—I am putting miles of ocean between me and the false, fair wife, who has cruelly wrenched from me the only comfort of my desolate life—my child—my little Catherine."

He closed the book; the story of his life was told. He sat now in the old abandoned house, master of its ruin—master too of wealth accumulated in foreign lands. His father's taunts at parting had aroused in him a new energy and stimulated his dormant faculties. Success had saved him from discouragement, but not from the consequences of overwork and harrowing anxiety with regard to the fate of his child. He valued his wealth only as a means of discovering her and bestowing upon her the comforts and luxuries which it pleased him to think that she would worthily use. He had hitherto been strangely misled in his inquiries; and only after several years of sojourn in France, did he determine to return to the old place under an assumed name and prosecute the search in person. He had heard from strange lips of his father's death—he had heard him stigmatized as a grovelling miser, who had died unloved and uncourted; but he made no effort to secure the fortune which was his own.

He was of a shy, timid nature, delicately sensitive of appearing intrusive, and his meeting with Kitty had satisfied him that to accost young ladies during their walks was probably not the proper way to undertake his task. His wanderings about the country had been productive of little satisfaction; but his visit to Blackwell's and Ursula's description of the "beautiful *demonella*" had excited him to fresh hope, and he determined once again to seek Dr. Maribel and learn from him the truth with regard to the child whom he had protected. Grace, the little sister to whom Frances had been governess, was sent, after her mother's death, to a distant boarding school where she had died; and thus Oscar Featherstone had found himself bereft in early life of those chances of happiness which belong to family relations.

"O reader dear! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea;
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarcely seemed there to be."

So lonely now in the deep night watches—so lonely in the golden hours of the morn—so lonely in the sweet hush of eventide—always so lonely!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"TO WHAT ISSUE WILL THIS COME?"

AGATHA WILBRAHAM held an open letter in her hand. It was from her husband. The warm affection breathed through every line, the solicitude manifested for her pleasure and comfort, were like so many words of burning reproof. She had gone to her own room to read it, shunning the possibility of encountering the sharp, questioning looks of De Roussy, which were obviously significant of a watchful suspicion, aroused by the fear that the better part of Agatha's nature—which had been prominently brought forward by influences hitherto unexperienced, and therefore to be guarded against—might impel her to a course of conduct which would endanger the success of his plans. He knew that the task which she had set herself was becoming each day more difficult, and that she contemplated its fulfilment with strong repugnance. Agatha, on her part, knew that the man with whom she had to deal was as unscrupulous as he was exacting, and that he would hold her to the compact which she had made with him. In obedience to his wishes, she had invited Kitty

to Worleigh. His subtle reasoning had overcome her prudence, but it could not quell the apprehension which chilled her heart and quickened her conscience into remorseful agony. That very day she had seen Kitty riding on horseback, accompanied by Colonel Covington. It was her habit to take a daily drive, more to break into the wearisome monotony of her life than from any enjoyment which she found. Indeed, she seldom cared for

"Nature's sweet voices, always full of love and joyance,"

and she sat looking absently out on the objects which they passed, her thoughts far away in other scenes, dwelling on memories which sometimes brought a flush of triumph to her cheek, or often a look of deep dejection which paleled them into the wanness of melancholy.

"Wilkins, whither does that road lead?" she asked of the coachman, indicating with her finger the direction taken by Colonel Covington and Kitty.

"Dat road, mistess, takes you by Searing's mill, an' after you cross de creek you can go on to Mapleton, or turn to de left and go to de ole place; but de road ain't been worked on I dunno when, and it's becase nobody is gwine to pass dere, ef dey can help it."

"Well, I have a notion to go there, Wilkins."

Anything which promised variety was enticing to her; she was bored to death at Worleigh.

The road was in so bad a condition that she determined

to walk, leaving Wilkins to wait for her. Walking along the rough road, her sliken skirt brushing the dust from the golden-rods that bordered it, her small feet leaving their slender tracks in the sand, she came to the iron gates that shut in the desolate house. A blank dismay was on her face, as she clutched the iron to prevent herself from falling. The wild, scared eyes looked up at the old building, standing in the deep shadow of the huge oak boughs that swayed above its roof. She stood with the warm sunshine glistening on the sleeves of her silk—with the hum of bees and the twitter of the sparrows in the hedges—with the trailing trumpet-vine showering its red blossoms at her feet, and the stone lions looking down grimly upon her. She was gazing at this ruin and desolation, with the awful consciousness that she had caused it all.

The history of the Featherstones had almost died out of the memory of people; the old house had stood untenanted for so many years that its existence was scarcely known; the road leading to it was untravelled, and its neighborhood avoided by the superstitious. According to old Mr. Featherstone's directions, when he went away, a negro man and his wife had been settled on the place, with the privilege of cultivating land sufficient to supply their wants, and they were left in charge of the house and furniture. Agatha had never dreamed that the old place was so near to Worleigh. She had lived there but a short time, so many long years ago, and then she had gone so

so dem from the place that she knew little of the neighborhood. The family had slight intercourse with their neighbors. Mrs. Featherstone's health was delicate, and Mr. Featherstone was wanting in those social qualities which encourage hospitality; so that Agatha's surprise at finding herself at the gates of her old home was as genuine as it was painful.

"God help me!" she moaned, as she staggered away, her long robe trailing in the dust, her teeth set into her mother lip to keep back a cry of agony. Her overpowering emotion had mastered the little strength which she possessed, and she sank to the earth sheltered by a group of cedars. Not too soon for concealment; for Ed. Covington and Kitty rode by, and she heard Kitty say, in her sweet, tender voice:

"She must have been a wicked woman, this Frances Featherstone, to have abandoned so good and noble a man; and how cruel in her to have taken away the child!"

The thud of the horses' feet grew fainter and fainter; she was left there in her horrible misery grovelling on the ground—her heart bleeding under the mockery of her costly lace.

An hour later she went back to the carriage and told Wilkins to drive quickly homeward, for her head ached—the sun was so very hot.

Wilkins was heard to tell the cook, on that very even-

ing, that he believed more than ever in the ghost. He doubtless had good cause for this accession of faith.

Agatha crushed her husband's letter in her hand as she went out on the piazza. It was late and the household had retired. As she paced to and fro, the power of her strong will gradually overcame the tumult of her feeling. She was perhaps involuntarily drawn into sympathy with the peaceful night, for she was gradually weaned from the consciousness of her own troubled life and the despotic influences which controlled it. Her highly wrought poetic temperament possessed the faculty, peculiar to such natures, of rising above the absolute and of drawing from sources wholly imaginative a sweet and dangerous pleasure. Many and many times before had she anchored near the flowery isle and listened to the alluring voice. With a sudden impulse she re-entered her room, and going softly down the stairs, she passed through the hall to an apartment on the left. This was the library. A light was burning there, and Gaston de Romy sat leaning comfortably in a luxurious chair, beside the open window.

"Gaston," said Agatha, "pray close the window. I must speak to you, and I would not be overheard."

He drew down the ash, and coming to her, said, "Something has occurred to disturb you."

"You know that I had a letter from Wilbraham this morning. He is coming home."

"Coming home? when?" said De Rousy, with face a shade paler.

"In a month or six weeks at furthest; and I have come here to-night, Gaston, to insist upon your giving up all thought of Kitty."

"You have come to insist upon my giving up all thought of Kitty!" He repeated the words, slowly emphasizing each one and looking at her with his glittering eyes, as like a serpent's. "From what source have you drawn your courage, madame? Have you put on an air of Leroism, and are you ready to embrace poverty, shame, and ignominy—are you ready to go back to the old life where I found you—are you willing to be separated from your child, and to leave her, as sole inheritance from you, the history of your life?"

"Fool that I was," she exclaimed, "to suppose that you could be merciful. Oh, Gaston! remember that I had not seen her when I made my fatal promise to you. Is it not enough that I have deceived a noble, trusting man—not enough that I have drawn from his generosity to supply you with those means which you have used in lavish expenditure—not enough that hitherto I have been your obedient slave, that you now ask of me a sacrifice so terrible?"

"Agatha," he answered, in a hard, sardonic tone, "you have not forgotten the tricks of your profession; and your hot Italian blood is driving you now to the extreme

of dramatic madness. Remember, I have seen you in such a rôle. To you, madame, repentance means ruin. I beseech you, save it for your death-bed. A word from me will send you a beggar from this house. This would indeed be a sad catastrophe, as you can no longer rely upon those charms which once served you well. You and I, Agatha, have no tender memories to fall back upon. Our acquaintance was made over the roulette table, and it has continued to this time merely because our interest is a common one. Your position is seriously critical; think well of it. It will be better for you and for Miss Pitkin, if you throw no obstacle in the way of our marriage. I repeat, that it will be better for Miss Pitkin."

"I do not understand you," she said, looking inquiringly in to his face.

"I do not mean that you shall;" he answered, "but you will do well to give that importance to my warning, which, I assure you, it deserves."

She went back to her room; and opening her dressing-case, took from it a vial containing a dark liquid, and pouring a few drops into a glass, she swallowed them. Of late she had resorted to this desperate and dangerous means of obtaining sleep.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"COME, KNOCK, AND ENTER."

THE week following Mr. Pitkin's death, Kitty had spent with Mrs. Parrott; but John Maribel noticed that she was drooping and out of spirits, so he proposed a visit to Col. and Mrs. Covington. Young natures need the sunshine of warm, genial hearts to blossom and expand into beauty; and a week spent at Oakland had been conducive to all the good results which John Maribel had hoped for. Col. Covington declared that Kitty had charmed away the monotony of country life; and she in turn, expressed a wish to prolong her visit. The intercourse between Worcleigh and Oakland became more frequent. Kitty spent long days with Mrs. Williamson, who exerted her varied accomplishments and the fascination of a manner delicately tender, yet never overstepping that formality which Agatha had prescribed to herself as the only safeguard against the betrayal of that maternal love which yearned so ardently for expression. Gaston de Ronny was never absent from Worcleigh during Kitty's visits.

Untutored in the arts of society—essentially trusting

in her estimate of him, which was based upon her knowledge of John Maribel's character—the only other young man of good social position whom she knew intimately—it was no wonder that Kitty was easily deceived by De Morsy's arts, and grew to like him, and to experience that consciousness of pleasure in his presence which he was quick to detect.

Once or twice a week John Maribel spent a few hours at Oakland. He was there when Col. Covington and Kitty returned from their ride. After lifting her from the saddle, he held her hand just as in the old days—and they went up the steps together.

“Have you been long here, John?” she asked.

“It would be very ungallant to Mrs. Covington for me, to say how long the time seemed while waiting for your appearance; but” [taking out his watch] “I have in reality been here just an hour and ten minutes.”

“If I had only known that you were coming, I might have put off my ride, but then I would have missed a delightful adventure.”

“An adventure, Kitty! Why, they seem to be waiting for you everywhere. Is it in Enoch Arden this time, looking for the home where ‘Annie lived and loved him?’”

“No such lugubrious personage, I declare!” she exclaimed, laughing; “but a woman in a short, blue petticoat, wearing a white muslin cap, with a fluted steel sur-

rounding her healthy, good-natured face. The strangest part of it all is that she is a French woman, and she speaks English very imperfectly. She was washing in a pool beside an old spring-house, where the water fell from a stone trough, and the trees formed a shade so thick that the sun scarcely penetrated to us. Her master—as he calls Mr. Putney—the gentleman who has chosen the desolate place for a residence, has lately come from abroad. He never receives visits, and goes but seldom beyond the grounds. I am dying to know who he is, and why he has come here."

"And so am I, Kitty," answered John. "It is all very much out of the common way of things, and, unless the man is crazy, he must have an object in coming to live in a place which is scarcely habitable."

John Marshall spoke lightly, but when Kitty ran up the stairs to take off her riding-habit, his face assumed a perturbed, anxious look, and he passed his fingers through his hair—a sure sign with him of perplexity of thought. He knew nothing of Kitty's parentage; it was clearly his duty to follow any clue which would lead to a solution of a mystery which could but prove a serious disadvantage to her. Who was this strange man who had come to the old Featherstone place? Had chance made him a dweller within its crumbling walls, or had some powerful motive drawn him thither? John inclined to the latter opinion. By a natural succession of ideas, he connected the stranger

with the Featherstone family; and was it not also natural to suppose that Kitty was of their blood?

With the opulent attributes of a noble and generous nature, John Maribel at once put aside those considerations which would have actuated a less unselfish man. There was a certain peril to himself connected with the discovery of wealth and position for Kitty, but he had no thought of avoiding a duty which each moment grew clearer and more imperative. He might lose Kitty, but he would never lose his own self-respect, when they were wanted he knew how to bring the strong points of his character to his aid. He determined to go that very afternoon to seek an interview with Mr. Pullney. He set out accordingly after dinner, and as he passed through the gate he perceived Gaston de Rousy approaching on horseback. He sat on his horse with admirable grace, and drew rein, holding out his hand to Dr. Maribel, and greeting him with a show of cordiality which their acquaintance scarcely warranted.

"How are you, my good Doctor. I hope no one is sick at Oaklands."

"I permit myself, now and then, the privilege of making an unprofessional visit," answered John.

"And you come to Oaklands?" said De Rousy; "ah, Doctor! I can well understand your fatherly regard for Miss Patkin. She really feels for you the utmost love and respect," and De Rousy waved to him a graceful "adieu."

reservoir," putting at the same time a safe distance between himself and the thoroughly provoked physician. John Maribel's face still bore traces of decided ill-humor, as he turned into a path which diverged from the main road and led by a nearer way to the Featherstone place. He hesitated for a moment to cross the bridge so evidently out of repair, and while so doing, he saw Perry approaching from the other side. There was a drooping dejection about his whole person, even his usually scrupulously neat attire was evidently neglected, if not slovenly.

"I am right glad to see you, Doctor," he said, shaking hands; but his manner was reserved, and he turned his eyes quickly from John's somewhat inquiring look.

"Why haven't you been to town lately, Perry? I expected you last Saturday."

"Oh! I've been pretty busy fixing up Mr. Blackwell's barn, and I couldn't well get away."

John Maribel saw very clearly that there was something wrong; but he was not a man to force another's confidence; and Perry had often baffled his attempts at an intimate knowledge of his affairs, and equally repressed his desire to benefit him. It was hard for him to confine the light and warmth of his kind heart where its sympathy was needed; so he held out his hand to Perry, saying:

"Dean, you know where to find a friend when you want one. Good-by, old fellow."

He had a very short way to go before he came to those old iron gates which shut in the Featherstone mansion. Fastening his horse to the rusty railing, he pushed them open. A mottled stake crossed his path, and the chill of dampness struck him as he walked under the dense shadows of the oaks. The old brass knocker, green with verdigris, resounded through the empty hall, the sound reaching Ursula in the kitchen, where she was busy with her master's dairy maids.

"*Mon Dieu!* but this is a ghostly place!" she cried, "that one should be so startled by a knock at the front door."

She put her iron on the glowing charcoal, and went to answer the knock.

"Is Mr. Pultney at home?" asked John Maribel, half-stuffed with the dust and lime which fell when the heavy door was opened.

"*Mille pardons!* monsieur," exclaimed Ursula; "nothing but dust and ruin in this old house. Ah! that I am sorry. I will get you one glass of water—you suffocate."

"No, no!" answered John, coughing and wiping his eyes. "Pray, have the kindness to inform Mr. Pultney that Dr. Maribel has called on very important business."

"I am very sorry, but Mr. Pultney is not at home."

"Do you know when he will return?"

"I cannot answer, monsieur."

It is a notable fact that resolutions made in moments

of highest moral fortitude do not always secure their object. John Maribel was in his heart relieved that the evil hour was postponed. He was thinking always of the gulf which would separate him from Kitty should she prove to be the heiress to the Featherstone estate.

He was glad to get away from the lonely place—to ride out once again into light and sunshine. Far off, the sun-rays rested on two hills, wooded with oaks and chestnuts, their foliage hanging transparent beneath the light. The full-uddered cows treaded lazily the homeward path; a thousand voices mingled in the air; a thousand wings fluttered from bush to tree, the western sky was all aglow with evanescent gradations of tint, and as John Maribel crossed the creek, he heard Patty Searing's voice telling him in a clear, high soprano, that—

"If a body meet a body coming through the rye,
If a body kiss a body, need a body cry?"

"I am sure," thought John, "if your lips are as sweet as your voice, Patty Searing, nobody could be blamed for tasting of them."

He had a long road before him, and carried an anxious heart; but Patty's song cheered him on his way, and then the stars came out to keep him company, and the voices of the night whispered in his ear their mysterious words:

"Hereforth he should know
That nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure."

CHAPTER XXX.

"GIVE ME ADVANTAGE OF SOME BRIEF DISCOURSE."

JAMES PULTNEY rang the bell at Dr. Maribel's gate. His appearance certainly justified in a measure Nellie Shea's prompt conclusions as to the proper course to pursue towards one whose dust-coated garments, slouched hat, and drooping figure strongly suggested to her a possible solicitor for charity. She opened the gate with that defiant manner which servants, naturally assume towards shabbiness, saying to the astonished gentleman, as she drew down her sleeves over her red arms:

"And it will be long that you'll wait if you've come asking for money to send Bibles to the Camanches and such like heathen."

"Pray, my good woman, what is there in my appearance to suggest to your mind that I am solicitous for the conversion of Camanches? Here is my card; be so kind as to take it in to Dr. Maribel."

"It's no sort of use for you to wait. Dr. Maribel ain't at home; and Mrs. Parrott, that's his aunt, is a sensible woman, who knows, when she gets a penny, how to keep it in the bottom of her pocket."

"Let me assure you," exclaimed Mr. Pultney, "that I have no design upon Mrs. Parrott's premises, and since Dr. Marshall is not at home, I will be really obliged to you if you will take my card to your mistress."

With the card something else was slipped into Nellie's hand. Of course the aspect of affairs changed at once. Now that she looked at him again, Nellie was really astonished that she could have made so strange a mistake.

She returned in a few moments, unlocked the gate, and invited Mr. Pultney to enter.

"Mrs. Parrott is at home, sir, and begs that you will come in."

Mrs. Parrott sat in her darkened room. She had bid Nellie pull down the blinds, and when Mr. Pultney greeted her, he saw only a little old woman in an arm-chair, who excused herself for not rising on account of her great affliction. He did not mark the curious scrutiny in her look, nor saw the flash of recognition that passed over her face while she clasped her poor old hands tightly together on her lap.

"Madam," said Mr. Pultney, bowing low, "when I will have acquainted you with the object of my visit, I am very sure that you will excuse the liberty of my somewhat persistent desire to be admitted to an interview. I have but lately returned to the place of my birth, and I by what some would call the monomania of one cherished idea. I once had a child, madam—a daughter. One day,

not far from your house, I met a young girl—the very embodiment of loveliness—bearing a striking likeness to one whose name has long since failed to recall to me aught save the bitterness of remorseful shame. I accosted her, but she had never heard the name by which I addressed her; and completely discouraged, I returned to my desolate home without making an attempt to see Dr. Maribel.

My father's treatment of me during my boyhood, and his taunts at our parting—which was under circumstances of peculiar bitterness—so completely estranged me from him that, for many long years, I have been ignorant of any knowledge concerning him. I have learned but lately that a child was found beside his dead body, left there by some unknown person, and that she had about her dress a letter confiding her to the care of Dr. John Maribel. Madam, if you know anything of this child, and I assume that you do, for the love of God, assuage a father's anxiety, and help him to restore her to the position which is by right her own."

The old lady had known beforehand why James Pultney had come. The change of name did not deceive her; she knew too that Agatha was in deadly peril. To put him off, to satisfy him that Kitty was not his child; to set him on a false track; to devise some means to deceive him, and to keep him from seeing John Maribel—these were the thoughts that coursed through Mrs. Parrott's brain, as

she looked at Mr. Pultricy. Although far from being a devoted woman, Mrs. Pitkin would have been a better one had she not hardened her own heart, by a process of dissecting the worldly hearts by which, in former years, she had been surrounded. Her intimate knowledge of them had not helped to create general sympathy with mankind. Without further hesitation, she determined to sacrifice this man. Her love for Agatha was the one absorbing passion of her life.

She straightened herself in her chair; her face assumed a hard, repellent expression, and she said.

"I have lived for many years with John Maribel; and if God has made the majority of men hard and selfish, seeking only their own good, unmindful of the claims of their fellows, He has also, in moments of divine cleanness, moulded creatures nearly akin to His own grand and pure attributes, in whom we recognize intuitively the difference between man and man. The best of characteristics are often allied to faults which dim their lustre. In John Maribel I see the beauty of a character which is governed by the steady impulses of a virtuous and generous nature. Unimaginative—looking at things in a homely, practical way, he is yet liable to be moved to the highest and noblest impulses, and to act from them regardless of consequences to himself.

"When he took Kitty to good old Mrs. Pitkin, he assumed the charge of her maintenance as a matter of course.

He was poor at the time, very poor; but he received as he pressed the little helpless one to his breast, the highest idea of charity—that which begins in self-denial, and which suffers that self-denial in silence and in secret. His reward came in the love of the child. This love has been a strong motive power in his life; it has strengthened with years, and now holds him in its bondage. His noble self-abnegation, his beautiful humility, his delicate honor, all act as safeguards to his prudence. He has never tried to force into flower the germs of a love which might have ripened into a woman's impassioned devotion. He is giving her a fair opportunity to choose for herself, but should she choose unwisely, it will break his heart. And you have come, sir, to put the first thorn into this man's flesh; to make him miserable and anxious by stirring up inquiries about Kitty's birth. The strongest probability is that she is a child of old Mr Featherstone. Spare John Maribel, who is satisfied as things are; spare the poor, unpeccant child whose life will be clouded by the knowledge of a mother's shame."

"My God! madam," exclaimed the agonized man, "do you not know that Catharine Featherstone, should she be alive, is more unfortunate even than is this foundling? Have you never heard the story of Oscar Featherstone's young wife?"

"Yes," she answered, "I have heard her story; and in my judgment you have acted unwisely in coming to seek

for your daughter in a quiet country neighborhood, or even within the precincts of a town whose dimensions permit its inhabitants to know a great deal too much about one another's affairs. No, go to Paris; your wife is likely to be found in its giddy glare or else in some fair Italian city, where the soul is lulled into forgetfulness in the glamour of sunshine, and in the soft, voluptuous air. Go there to seek the woman, and you will in all likelihood find your child. A woman such as is your wife would never have abandoned her child—in Europe there are so many ways to make profit out of talent or beauty. I am, taking for granted that the child of a beautiful and talented mother has inherited her gifts."

"Enough, enough," cried Mr. Pultney. "Was it necessary thus to pang my heart, to drag out its hidden dread, to bring me face to face with horrid probability? I will obey you, madam—I will go back to Europe; I will seek there once more for my child. Believe me, on the honor of a gentleman, that John Maribel's life shall know no trouble from act of mine."

He took leave of the old lady in an aimless, hopeless sort of way. As he went out he saw not the far-off glory in the sky, nor heard the full waters lapping the white beach. He saw nothing, he heard nothing; Mrs. Parrott's words had crushed out hope. The burning suspicion of what *might be* consumed his heart;

CHAPTER XXXI.

"OPEN THY GATES OF MERCY, GRACIOUS GOD!"

IN the following morning a carriage might have been seen crossing the ford just above Searing's Mill. On reaching the opposite bank it stopped, and a gentleman, who was no other than Mr. Pultney, alighted from it, pausing only to pay the fare to the coachman, before he set out to walk the short distance which would bring him to the gates of the avenue. The sun was just rising as he turned the rusty bolt and lingered to watch the glory of the opening day—to see the world grow conscious of its life in the smile of the beneficent sun. On his wan face was the look of one who, in the travail of sorrow, had caught sight of God's angels ascending and descending, bringing on their healing wings the balm of Christ's great consolation. The calm of a beautiful faith softened the lines of his worn countenance as he murmured reverently, "*Desiderat anima mea ad te Domine.*"

Ursula had been on the look-out for him since daylight. Her face brightened as at last she espied him coming up the avenue. He was walking, bare-headed, carrying his

hat in his hand, and she interpreted correctly the expression which she saw in his uplifted eyes when she said to herself:

"He has blundered into some fresh disappointment; but the humility of his great soul has already bowed with loving submission to God's will."

Going back to her kitchen, she poured out a cup of hot, fragrant coffee, and scarcely had he entered his room before she was there, pressing him to partake of it. Then, much as one manages a child, she threw a far cloak about his shoulders, drew off his wet shoes and put on his slippers, exclaiming, when she had placed a soft footstool under his feet:

"There, you look better now! You are overtaking your strength, and your strange wanderings will end in your being brought home with some bad fever on you—and in this desolate place, without good Doctor Bernier! *Mon Dieu!* it makes me tremble to think of it."

"Take comfort, Ursule; we will go back to France."

"To France!" she exclaimed, her face radiant with joy.

"Yes, the sooner the better; this spot has ever been fatal to me. My staying here has no longer an object. I will go back to France."

He said this in a hopeless tone, with a manner of settled resignation which irritated Ursule into that peculiar movement of the shoulders which meant just that slight

exasperation which her strong, energetic nature experienced when brought into contact with her master's besetting weakness.

During the years that she had served him with untiring devotion and faithfulness, her rare discretion had avoided any manifested curiosity with regard to his history. She had nevertheless gathered from words which he let fall from time to time, that, in spite of the extreme delicacy of his health and the brooding melancholy of his mind, there was something which sustained him and which helped him to live on. She shrewdly guessed that this something stimulated his restless anxiety and caused those frequent absences from home that had an object which, in his weak way, he was striving to attain.

Since Kitty's visit to the spring, Ursula had been tormented by a strange idea. Again and again Kitty's eyes seemed looking at her, and repeatedly she puzzled her brain to account for the persistence with which her memory dwelt upon each detail of her face and figure. As she looked at Mr. Pultney now, she was startled to find herself searching in his face for what had seemed familiar to her in Kitty's; and it was almost with a guilty blush that she met his eyes as he suddenly raised them, for her quickened heart-throbs told her that she had made a discovery. The large, dark eyes, full of tender, liquid light, were like those of the "beautiful demoiselle."

Ursula was essentially a discreet and prudent woman. She too truly loved her master to risk his displeasure by indelicacy or effrontery, but to her mind he was as much as a child to grapple with difficulties. His very goodness and gentleness, his fear of injuring others, and his guileless acceptance of whatever was told to him, were so many weapons which might be turned against him. He sadly lacked a knowledge of the ordinary motive springs of men and a safer acquaintance with the world in which he lived and with which he had scarcely a thought in common—he lacked the knowledge of the world which, if joined to higher qualities, makes them all the more commanding. Ursula went back to the kitchen, and soon the full notes of the organ swelled with the inspiration of that "master and prince of God's name," Palestrina, whose compositions for more than three hundred years have filled the domes of St. Peter and the naves of the Sistine with the subliment of unapproached sublime music.

"*Mon Dieu !* listen now," murmured Ursula. "What a man! I had all the trouble in the world to get the tenderloin steak for him and the fresh-laid eggs, and when I take his breakfast to him, what with his walking and his organ-playing, he will be too exhausted to eat."

The juicy steak, the fresh-laid eggs, with the accompaniment of delicate rolls and chocolate in the *majolica* cup, were in due time placed before him, but, as Ursula

had predicted, the appetite was wanting, and the savory breakfast was taken away with scarcely an evidence of its having been tasted.

"I had forgotten," she said, coming back into the room, "this was left for you," and she handed him John Maribel's card.

He held it in his hand looking at the name, as he said: "I know all that he would have told me, Ursula. Make ready for our departure. It is urgent that I should leave this place at once."

Ursula went back to her work, but her thoughts were busier than her hands. She had hitherto been content to perform the duties of a servant to this man. She had known him first at Nantes. It was in the time of the vintage, and he had been wandering through the wine country, but on reaching Nantes he sickened and she was sent for to nurse him. He had paid her well, and now had never left him. At first she had stayed for the wages, afterwards because she grew to love him, his gentle helplessness winning from her that truly womanly feeling which is protective and faithful. The dependence of Mr. Pultney in no way interfered with her genuine respect for those qualities of heart and mind which her perspicacity enabled her to detect and appreciate. There was in him that union of grandeur and simplicity, of strength and weakness, which makes up a character peculiarly unfitted for the rough handling which one is apt to incur when

thrown into contact with the world; and so, long ago Ursula had placed herself between her master and those commonplace difficulties over which he would otherwise have been constantly stumbling. Now she began to see that she must go a step farther—he needed her clear, sound judgment, her active interference, and he should have it. The first step necessary was to see Dr. Maribel, and this she determined to do.

The kitchen had been improvised out of a former pantry. A Frenchwoman's quick intuition had converted the dilapidated room into a cozy apartment. The cooking utensils, the coppers and tins, were of exquisite brightness—the floor polished to the last degree of cleanliness—the stock of wood piled in a corner, and on the shelves, together with the commoner sort, were dishes and plates, and cups of old china—none alike, but all of beautiful design. A window opened on the back yard, and the gurgling of the spring, falling from the trough into the pool, could be heard, suggesting coolness and refreshment. Among the thickly fallen leaves Ursula hears the rustle of footsteps, and then girlish voices. A moment afterwards Patty Searing and Abby Blackwell came in. Abby carried a basket on her arm.

The sun-burnets were laid aside, and Patty, by way of introducing Abby, took up her basket and uncovered the rolls of yellow butter and the fresh eggs.

"Abby Blackwell has come a long way, Madam Ursula,

and I hope you will buy her eggs and butter. You won't find such butter anywhere as they make at Hillside."

"It is like gold," said Ursula, "and the eggs so fresh—so fresh. Yes, I will take them; you have come far?"

"A matter of five miles," answered Abby, staring about her. Everything was so strange and new—even to be in the old house without hearing the dreaded ghost was incredible, so firmly did she believe in the story of its being haunted.

Patty Searing had regularly furnished Ursula with milk and vegetables since the tenants came to live at the old place, and in many ways she had made herself useful to the foreign woman, who liked her bright face and pleasant smile, and looked forward to her visits as an agreeable break upon her solitude. This one afforded the opportunity for asking some questions about the neighborhood—an interest developed since her master's return. It had hitherto been confined to her immediate surroundings, and there were so utterly out of keeping with cheerfulness and comfort that she naturally associated the whole of America with the ideas of disgust with which she beheld them, and as naturally evinced a strong dislike to extending her acquaintance with its people. Now, however, a controlling motive urged her to ask those questions which the loquacious Abby was only too ready to answer.

"Yes, of course, she knew the young lady who had come to the spring with Col. Covington. They were grand

folks, these Covingtons and Wilbrahams; and now Kitty Pitkin ever got to stay there, Abby didn't know." "I suppose it's all on account of Dr. Maribel," she continued. "He's mighty fond of her, and comes up once or twice a week regular. People do say there's somebody she likes better, but to my thinking she'd better keep to Dr. Maribel."

Ursule had bent her whole attention to Abby's words, and she had gathered from them the possibility of seeing Dr. Maribel within a very few days.

"And the name of the beautiful demoiselle? Pardon, I forget."

"Kitty Pitkin."

"Oh! but it is barbarous. *Ketty Pitkin!*"

"You do not perhaps know, Madam Ursule," said Patty, "that Kitty is short for Catherine."

"Catherine—ah! yes—Catherine is a very pretty name—Catherine—ah! yes."

Ursule had discovered her first clue. She had seen the name of "Catherine Featherstone" in an old prayer-book upstairs.

"Don't you know Babet over at Worleigh?" continued Abby. "She came there with Mrs. Wilbraham, and the servants they hate her like poison. She turns up her nose at folks that are her betters anyhow! Miss Eleanor—she's Mr. Wilbraham's sister—they say is fretting her life out, and I reckon Mr. Wilbraham would

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come home fast enough if he knew some other things that are going about."

Abby would have gossiped all the morning, but Ursula had learned all that she wanted to know. She would see Dr. Maribel that very week, and must make a pretext for going to Oakland.

Fate never grows weary of her work. She weaves the intricate meshes of her web, twisting into it, with subtle and marvellous cunning, lives that seem far apart, yet in some mysterious way influence one another. Mrs. Parrott slept, satisfied that Agatha's secret was safe. Ursula watched in the lonely house with all the goings on of the world

"Inaudible as dreams."

Her busy brain was fast undoing Mrs. Parrott's work.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"TIS PROBABLE AND PALPABLE TO THINKING."

WLD Mr. Featherstone had sold the greater part of the furniture of the house; but his wife's and Oscar's rooms had remained pretty much as they had left them, except what dampness and rats had

destroyed. From these rooms Ursula had taken various articles for her master's use, but there were chests of drawers, armoires, and closets which had not been opened for years; these she determined to visit. The hope of discovery stimulated her to execute her purpose without delay. The steadily stairway, creaking under her weight, seemed to protest against the invasion of its long rest, and from out of the black shadows in the long hall the bats came swooping towards the light, wheeling around and around her head, fluttering their hideous wings, and snapping their teeth in a spiteful way, as if they, too, were putting in a protest against an intrusion upon premises which long possession had given them the right to claim as their own.

Ursula opened the door of Mrs. Featherstone's room. The massive mahogany bed stood just where it had been placed when Ethan Featherstone superintended the arrangement of this room for the reception of his bride. An old-fashioned dressing-table held the dust-covered toilet articles; a couch, from which the covering had long since fallen away, kept company with the chairs, a smell of dampness everywhere—a worn, silent decay, clinging to the old walls and the blackened pictures hanging on them. Ursula was a brave woman, but she was not proof against ghastly terrors which came so naturally there, with the dead woman's property crumbling away into decay, and the close, damp odor of the charnel-house

rising up around her. She put down the candle which she carried, and made the sign of the cross.

"They always have them," she thought; "these Protestants record the births and death is in them." She was in search of Mrs. Featherstone's family Bible.

On each side of the fireplace were cupboards with doors. Ursula tried one of them. The rusty lock yielded; but the shelves were empty—nothing save one or two broken wine-glasses and some bottles. These had probably been used for the dead woman—these bottles had contained the medicines which human skill had devised to relieve the pangs of suffering and to arrest the progress of death. The other cupboard had evidently been a receptacle for books and papers; the moths and mice, however, had left but few traces of either. Ursula was about to close the door, when she espied on the topmost shelf a tin box, secured by a padlock. After trying one after another of the keys on her bunch, she succeeded in opening it with a small brass one. The box contained old letters, yellow with time and mouldy with damp; but her face brightened with satisfaction as, on opening the very first one, she found the signature to be that of "Catherine Featherstone."

Tucking the box under her arm and taking up the candle, she went out of the room, closing and locking the door. She paused, for from below there arose a sad, plaintive strain. It filled the midnight stillness of the old

house with echoes sweet and long, dying away in a minor chord. Music takes to itself a thousand gentle, suggestive tones—it is the language of the soul—its communion with God. Those wailing notes seemed like the cry of a weary soul doomed to its fetters of sorrow through a long, sad life. There was something in the last despairing chord that spoke, as nothing else could have done, to Ursula's heart. A great pity went out to the gentle, suffering soul. She put out outside his door. The vibration of the organ filled the room as if the hand still lingered on the keys. Ursula softly turned the lock. Her master sat before the organ, his hands pressing the ivory keys; but his head had sunk forward, and in a moment more he would have fallen to the floor. It was the work of a minute for the strong woman to lift the fragile form and bear it to his bed in the adjoining room. She had seen him thus before faint from long watching and fatigue. The remedies were close at hand, and when she received his grateful smile after swallowing the reviving cordial, she left him, but only to go into the next room and put down the lamp, then to creep back and sit beside the bed until daylight; but as the light grew brighter in the eastern window, she noticed with feelings of keen alarm the true indications of fever in the restless sleeper. She was alarmed almost to the point of forgetting her usual prudence. The dread of having her master fall in that lonely place had taken away from her the full exertion of her

faculties; for she stood like one who had received some sudden check which had stunned her. The consciousness of peril to one beloved rarely stimulates quick action; the mind must have time to accustom itself to the shock, before it revives sufficiently to obtain command over those emotions which are fatal to the calm exercise of its reasoning powers. A word, a sound, is sometimes all that is necessary to bring new agencies into action, and the sound of wood-splitting in the kitchen brought with it the consciousness of human aid, which, at the moment, was what Ursula most needed. The hired boy was making the fire. Ursula flew to the kitchen. "Go to the mill," she cried; "tell them that I will pay any price to have a messenger sent at once for Dr. Maribel."

Only a few hours before, Ursula had been devising how she could bring about an interview with John Maribel, and now, through the very means which she most dreaded, she saw the accomplishment of her purpose. Her master was ill—away from Dr. Bernas—away from France, and, in her opinion, very far from all human aid; so she prayed all the more fervently to the good Lord.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"BUT DOTH HE KNOW THAT I AM IN THE FOREST?"

THE speckled hens walked demurely up the roost, and fanned and rustled until they had settled themselves comfortably for the night; while the lordly cock followed, his plumage all green and gold as a sun ray touched him with its glittering sheen. From the upper floor of the great barn, Jope threw down armfuls of fragrant hay to the mild-eyed oxen, and the cows stepped eagerly across the bars which separated them from their dappled calves. With milking-stool and pail, Mrs. Blackwell was ready for them, and as she drew the rich milk from the full udders, her eyes wandered frequently in the direction of the road.

Mark Blackwell was late coming from the field. The fodder must be gathered—there were threatening clouds grouping in the north-west; and then, a neighbor had stopped to say that down by the creek he had found a litter of young pigs in their bed of pine-straw. After the fodder had been piled, Blackwell went down to see whether the pigs belonged to him. He searched about amid the

growing shadows, under the great pines, and where the magnolia and the bay trees dropped their glossy leaves. He crushed with his great rough shoes the wild mint and the tender green moss that clung about the roots of the trees; and at last, huddled together in their comfortable bed, he found the little pinkish-white things, with the huge, ugly mother guarding about them. He would come down for them to-morrow, he thought, and making his way through the knotted grass and tangled underwood, he came out upon the road near the confines of Worlegh.

The old man was weary with his day's work. He had stood in the field since early morning, only stopping to rest at noon, when he ate his dinner under the shade of the great walnut tree. He had expected Abby to bring it, and he was disappointed and angry when Jape told him that she had gone out to sell her eggs and butter. How often had he expressed disapproval of these journeys—how often had he forbidden her going from home without protection! "By this time," he said to himself, "she must be at home helping her mother with the milking."

The shadows darkened—the night came on apace, and just here the pines stood thick and their pungent odor grew stronger in the freshened breeze, and then the sun sank down behind the hills, and one by one the welcome stars came out. All his life had Blackwell lived in field and forest; year after year had he watched seed-time and harvest, toiling always with frugal industry and patient

waiting. Living in close communion with Nature, it was strange that he had never caught the sweetness of her voices, or learned, through her teaching, the gentle lesson of God's love. No, he knew Him only in the awful majesty of a jealous and sin-punishing divinity. He sang now, as he walked along, "Sinners, wherefore will ye die?" in a strong, harsh bass voice. Not far from the road, seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, with De Rouzy by her side, Abby heard him undaunted, for she knew that his just anger would fall upon her, should he discover her sinful disobedience. The lance which De Rouzy held turned cold. In terror she snatched it from him and rose to her feet.

"Father will get home, and I am not there," she said.

"What of that?" answered De Rouzy.

"I don't like to be scolded and misjudged; and that I would be if any body says that I've done any harm, sitting here talking to you."

"Nothing could be more innocent, my dear," said De Rouzy, with a disagreeable smile, attempting to possess himself of her hand. "Come, *ma belle*, confess that you love me just a little. Is it so hard a thing to do?"

Abby did not answer directly. She was vain and ignorant, but not altogether wanting in sense, and she knew that any yielding on her part would be dangerous. The man's subtle arguments were fast searching out the evil in her nature and striking at the root of her filial respect

and duty, and it must be confessed that a weak dread of consequences, rather than any honest opposition to his wishes, made her cautious. It little concerned Gaston de Rousy how, for his own selfish gratification, he tampered with her good name and risked an honest man's happiness. Indeed, if he thought at all about it, it was to scoff at the idea of a common fellow like Perry knowing anything of the refinement of feeling which would cause him to suffer under an infelicity. In his code of morals, money was an all-healing salve, and when he grew weary of Abby's rustic charms, Perry should be heartily welcome to them.

"Good-night," she said; "I am going straight across the meadow, and if I walk fast I'll get home before father."

"You won't answer, Abby?"

"No," she exclaimed, "I won't. I wouldn't be a hypocrite, if I were you! Perhaps I don't know about Kitty Pitkin."

She darted away through the "green gloom of the wood," and, on opening the gate that led into the barn-yard, she found herself face to face with Perry. He had watched her crossing the meadow, and now he let her pass without speaking. He could not for the life of him have said a word to her.

Paler than when she went, and breathing with the loud respiration of one laboring under the effect of unusual exertion, Abby went into the kitchen where her mother was preparing the supper.

"Oh, Abby! I'm so glad that you have come! Where have you been all day?" said Mrs. Blackwell, looking searchingly into her face and feeling that uneasiness in her heart which she called a "presentiment," but which was really the alarm of conscience, accusing her of weakness in her control of her daughter, and sounding a danger which she might have seen if she had not persistently shut her eyes to it.

"Why, mother, I've been down to Sealing's," she said, "and Patty walked part of the way back with me. I sold the eggs and butter to the French woman who is staying at the old Featherstone place with that queer man that nobody can get a sight of. She's free enough with her money, anyhow."

Opening her little leather purse, she poured the silver on the table. This unusual generosity softened the poor mother almost to tears; for Abby had pushed the money towards her, saying: "There, you can have it."

"Why, Abby! what's come over you, to give me the money? Jope's going to town the day after to-morrow, and he can buy you the dark caico and the stockings that you said you wanted. Put your money back in your purse, daughter. Mother doesn't need it."

The girl took up the silver and dropped it piece by piece into the purse. She had offered her sacrifice to conscience, and was secretly satisfied that her mother had made it no harder for her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"NAY, NOW I SEE SHE IS YOUR TREASURE."



RS. PARROTT was waiting for John Maribel. It was no unusual thing for the old lady to sit up half the night,

"Desiring what was mingled with past years,
In yearnings that could not be expressed
By signs or groans or tears."

Each day was now to bring to her its torturing terrors until she were assured that Oscar Featherstone had left the country. She waited from hour to hour listening for John Maribel's footsteps, and when at last he came in to his supper, she marked his silence and the gravity of his face. He had usually a little cheerful gossip kept especially for the old lady's ear, and detailed in dainty little bits while he ate; for he had rarely time now to sit long with her, and his meals were taken at irregular hours just when he could be spared from his patients. John had never been much governed by rules, and of late he had fallen sadly into forgetting the dinner-hour and his "duty to his stomach," as Mrs. Parrott often told him. It did not occur to him now that he was indulging in the ego-

tion of silence, or that he was permitting Mrs. Parrott to get a glimpse into his individual interior life. The astute old lady read, like a book, the face which she had studied for so many years—a face which, in its frank good-humor, had brightened the hours of her weary life as never face had done before.

There is nothing more exhaustive to the human mind than the concentration of the consciousness upon one train of thought—a too long continued strain upon its functions.

Mrs. Parrott would have been glad to hear John talk in his old pleasant way about the sick people and the babies. He had been to Oakland—he had seen Kitty, and he had not a word to say. She remarked, too, that he swallowed his tea like one suffering from the cat, while he scarcely tasted the cold chicken. Rising and going to the mantel-shelf, he took a cigar.

"I wish you wouldn't sit up for me, Aunt," he said, scraping a match and proceeding to light the cigar. "In one way and another I have had a fatiguing day of it, and I shall be glad to get to bed. By the by, Kitty sent you a message. She is coming to town next week. Sniley wants her to sign some papers. I believe he has sold the old shop. I am to give you her love; to say that she is quite well and—and—I really forget."

"You are not apt to fail in remembering Kitty's messages, John. Is there anything amiss with the child?"

"Oh, no," he answered absently; then striking the ashra from his cigar with his finger, he continued, following the train of thought which had given to his face its grave and absorbed expression: "We cannot expect to keep her always to ourselves. It would scarcely be fair to her to wish it; and we must not hold it too hard, Aunt, if she likes her new life and the people with whom she is associated. It is all quite natural—it is even our duty, knowing as we do that the mystery about her birth is yet to be cleared, not to throw any obstacle in the way of having it done."

It was easier for him to associate Mrs. Parrott with his own feelings about Kitty. She knew at once that he had detected in the young girl that change which she had foreseen. It was certain that the best part of her nature would never develop in Agatha's society. None knew better than Mrs. Parrott how raptuously the young enjoy the luxuriance of the life which wealth, refinement, and cultivation create—how naturally their fancies give birth to hopes which can be realized only in this summer-day life. She knew, too, the subtle fascination which Agatha exercised over those whom she cared to please, and that Kitty, ignorant of the world and its ways, her homely life transformed into one of alluring enjoyment, must of necessity undergo a moral change. She would judge of things from a different standpoint; and what is so probable as that John should be the first to discover this? He

had seen her happy, and he had had no part in creating her happiness, and the seductive loveliness which was every day expanding into new charms would draw to her the love and admiration of others. John was jealous—jealous of his darling. It required not the marvel of second-sight to see this; but Mrs. Parrott knew that the great, honest heart of the man would easily reject a feeling which she half suspected was the offspring of the purest and most unselfish love. When he had said good-night and gone away, she sat with all the hard lines about her old face softened into regretful tenderness. A tear fell on her folded hands.

CHAPTER XXXV

"SIR, I WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU."

IN a dingy street, up a flight of steps, into a dingy hall on the right hand side, was the office of Meredith Smiley, Attorney and Counsellor at Law. Mr. Smiley sat in an inner office, which was comfortably furnished and well lighted. As he leaned back in his chair, his cheek resting on his thin, long hand, the

contraction of his brow indicated the perplexity of his thoughts. The outer office was occupied by a young gentleman who, at that moment, was busily engaged biting his finger nails. To see the hungry manner in which he attacked each of his fingers in turn, one would naturally have supposed that starving had driven him into self-devouring. The truth was that he, also, was in great mental tribulation; for he had mounted Pegasus, and, whip and spur as he might, the mighty steed would not scale the heights of Helicon. A sheet of note paper, drawn from between the leaves of the ponderous volume on the desk before him, would have convicted him of having outraged the muse and, also, of an unblushing design to lengthen the outrage by a sixth verse; for he had written "Oh!" and taken another bite at his thumbnail, when the voice of Mr. Smiley cruelly interrupted the completion of the line. "Benjamin, have you drawn up that bill of sale?" asked the bland attorney.

"In a minute, sir."

The verses were thrust between the leaves of Blackstone, and the rapid scratching of the pen satisfied Mr. Smiley that Benjamin had, for the thousandth time, been weakly succumbing to the wiles of the old thief, Procrastination.

Meredith Smiley, attorney and counsellor at law, had been shaped by nature out of two most approved legal patterns. There was in his manner a pleasing earnestness, joined

to bland urbanity, which was as distinctive a mark of his calling as is the Roman collar of the holy office of priesthood. So long had he simulated virtue, that he almost believed in the genuineness of the feelings which he expressed in language as remarkable for its purity as it was for a felicitous choice of words. I was going to say that he agreed with Talleyrand that "*La parole a été donnée à l'homme pour déguiser sa pensée*;" but I know that one hundred thousand, and more, people have allowed themselves to be hoodwinked by this pretended saying of Talleyrand, which is really the first sentence in Cuvier's prolegomena of the civil law, which reads in this wise: "*La parole a été accordée à l'homme pour exprimer sa pensée*." The only thing of Talleyrand's in this cynicism of substituting *déguiser* for *exprimer*. When it suited his purpose, Mr. Sanley's happy phrasing only expressed anything rather than his true convictions. The want of color about him struck one at first somewhat unpleasantly. His hair, of a pale, sandy hue, was growing thin about the temples, and his light blue eyes were set very close to a nose of unusual sharpness. Thin lips, white, regular teeth, and a certain doughiness of complexion, with a profuse sprinkling of wrinkles about the eyes and around the mouth, made up his characteristic physiognomy. He studiously avoided treading upon other people's toes; and the mild benevolence of his manner was peculiarly impressive. Indeed, Mr. Sanley was a favorite with old ladies, and derived a

large share of his practice from these credulous flies whom he so easily caught in the web of legal chicanery.

There was the patter of ascending feet on the stairs, a low, sweet laugh, and Benjamin's hands went up to his hair instinctively as he got down from his stool, and, putting on his best manner, held open the door. Kitty entered, accompanied by John Maribel. Like a sweet breath of country air, she came into the dingy office, her bright face fairly lighting up the dusty old place, and setting Benjamin beside himself with much admiration.

"How do you do, Mr. Hall?" she said, as she gave him her little gloved hand with a witching smile.

Benjamin stammered that he believed that he was very well, and went back to his desk, thinking that it would be an easy matter now to write his sixth verse. Kitty's presence was the inspiration on which he had needed. There were, however, two associated facts which acted adversely to the success of the would-be poet. One was, that his eyes would wander towards Kitty, and the other that the muse had suddenly grown so coy, that when he did catch a thought and managed to embody it, he found, to his dismay, that it expressed something quite different from what he intended saying.

The business was speedily transacted, and John Maribel and Kitty took leave. Oh! how dark and gloomy did the office appear to poor Benjamin, when the door closed behind them.

On the stairs they met a dapper little man bounding very loudly at each step, and seeming to find great difficulty in reaching the top with his short legs. The presence of Mr. McStebbins at the threshold of Mr. Smiley's office was disagreeably suggestive of some new development in Kitty's affairs.

John Maribel could not but know that she was leaving her majority, and that some great change was imminent for her. They went out into the golden sunshine. As he walked by her side, he felt a joy which grew out of the reality of this moment. She was not the once light-hearted child—he knew this—but her voice fell still sweetly upon his ear as her hand rested upon his arm.

John Maribel did not consider that the repression of his own feelings had lent to his manner a certain reserve, and that Kitty was thereby unconsciously influenced. Woman's intuition rarely fails her; her reasoning is not always correct, and she seldom analyzes, but she is a good physiognomist and rarely fails to read aright the face of one in whom her heart is interested. Kitty stole a glance at John's face; she saw that the hair about the temples was turning gray, and she feared that the dear, good friend was carrying some trouble in his heart. Moved by a sympathetic motive in which her thoughts were urged to express themselves, she said:

"Dear John, shall I go home with you?"

He did not answer immediately, for he was sorely

tempted to bid her stay—his home was so desolate; but he checked the words that would have told her this. "It is but an impulse," he thought, "a generous one, but an impulse for all that," so he said:

"You have promised Mrs. Covington, dear. It is kind of you to think of coming back, but I cannot consent to your giving up the country in this beautiful summer weather."

Kitty drew away her hand from John's arm; something in his tone had wounded her. She even walked a little further from him. John Maribel saw it all; but he could not comfort her. He would not by word or act bind her by the past. He wanted her love, not her duty. In his loyal sense of right he could not take advantage of circumstances—he had not one claim to urge against her free choice.

"Kitty," he said, "I am not ungrateful, but—but—it is best, dear, that you should be under the protection of Mrs. Covington, at least, just now."

"And why just now?" she exclaimed, a vivid color suffusing her face.

"Because," answered John Maribel, "she is a safer guardian for you than I am, dear Kitty."

She but half understood him, although inclination is often stronger than duty; and in her heart she was well satisfied that she might go back to Oaklands.

"There is Mrs. Wilbraham's carriage. See! she is beckoning to us, John."

Smiling and gracious, Agatha leaned from the carriage; but John's professional eye detected, even through her veil, the marks of recent agitation. No wonder, for she had but a short time before passed through one of those passionate interviews with Mrs. Parrott, which left her weak and exhausted. She sat there smiling and talking to John Muribel, and she had the knowledge of her deadly peril lying like a weight upon her heart. She had walked to and from his house, her dress covered with a light shawl and her face concealed beneath a thick veil. Only a few moments before their meeting had she seated herself in her carriage and bade the coachman drive slowly towards Mr. Stanley's office.

"How fortunate to have overtaken you, Miss Pitkin," she exclaimed; "I am charged with a message from Mrs. Covington. She bids me say that she hopes it will suit your pleasure to ride back to Oaklands with me. Need I add how delighted I shall be with your company?"

"Indeed, I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Wilbraham," answered Kitty, taking her seat beside her. "You will come up very soon, dear John," she added, turning to him and looking at his grave, quiet face.

"Shall you want me, Kitty?"

"I don't think that I deserve to have you ask me, John."

Her hand was in his—her face close to him. It lost nothing of its beauty in the white sunlight—it only seemed more lovely and more real in its warm life. A great desire lighted up his eyes into a momentary betrayal of his secret. Agatha saw it; but she understood this man as little as she understood the higher duties of life. He was dangerous in her sight because she could not comprehend that his love was a safeguard in itself—that its purity was so little commingled with the grosser elements of passion—so tenacious of its loyal intentions that it was a sublime consolation to John Maribel, even while he suffered acutely at the thought of its disappointment. It was so natural to love Kitty, that he must always go on loving her. It never occurred to him that anything that she might do could prevent this—that any circumstance could substantially interfere with his interest in her. "Delicately pure and marvellously fair" was that sweet young face. Oh! Kitty was to be desired above all things earthly; but he must have her as a free gift, or not at all.

He had said "good-by," and was turning to go back to his office, when his steps were arrested by Jopu. He had been standing near the carriage, just where he could get sight of Kitty.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor," he said, "but I was

waiting to get a chance to speak to you. Reuben Scaring came to our house this morning to borrow a horse to come after you. I just thought as I'd rather ride brown Betty myself; so I saddled her and came on first as she would carry me. The gentleman at the old place, sir, is took as bad as can be, and the French woman sent over to Scaring's at daylight; but they lost time looking up the mule; and then Reuben had to come over to our house. So, as time has been lost, sir, and I'm afraid he's pretty bad off, you'll please, sir, to come right along."

Agatha heard every word. She noted the strange look on John Maribel's face, and the quick movement of his eyes towards Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"A LUNATIC, LEAN-WITTED FOOL."

MR. MSTERBINS sat opposite to Meredith Smailey. The long white finger of the lawyer was pointing to a passage in a legal document before him, which he read slowly, emphasizing each word, and making pauses, which seemed to have an irritating

effect upon his companion, who, with knit brows, sat impatiently tapping the table with his short, pudgy finger.

"I must confess, Smiley, that you have given me an overdose of law to-day," exclaimed Mr. McStebbins when the tedious formula had been gone through with. "I shan't enjoy my dinner. I never do, after coming here. A man had as well put on a hair shirt at once as to stand all this brain friction over your legal technicalities.

"You know the law, your exposition

Hath been most sound: I charge you, by the law

Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar,

Proceed to—explanation."

A look of annoyance passed over the lawyer's face. There was in Mr. McStebbins' manner just a shade of insolence, aroused, perhaps by a suspicion that the lawyer underrated his powers of comprehension, and had purposely lengthened out the tiresome details of the law.

"Will you permit me to say, Mr. McStebbins," answered Mr. Smiley, "that the will is clear, succinct, and definite in every clause. As it stands, I see no question which can arise as to the feasibility of carrying out its conditions. Remember that my opinion is based upon my knowledge of circumstances as they exist to-day—but—"

"Good God! Smiley, why do you come in with your 'lute'?"

"But," continued the imperturbable lawyer, "should complications arise, the consequences might be grave. The conditions of the will are imperative."

"You mean to say that any violation of them would materially affect the heir-at-law?"

"Most assuredly. In case of such violation, she will be deprived of the bulk of the property, receiving only the moderate annuity of five hundred dollars. The residue of the estate goes to the son of Mrs. de Ferriere, who was Mr. Featherstone's only sister. This young man is a dissipated adventurer, whom I have failed to trace. Some years ago he had a difficulty at Wiesbaden with an Austrian officer. I was in Paris at the time, and happened to hear of the circumstances, which were very damaging to the character of young De Ferriere. Since then, I have entirely lost sight of him, and I fervently hope that I may have no occasion to seek him."

"Let me see," said Mr. McStebbins, holding up the forefinger of his left hand and tapping it with the forefinger of his right. "The malignant old fool imagined that, after eighteen years of church-yard, he could put his skeleton finger into the pie and control the life of such a creature as Catherine Featherstone. Smiley, the whole thing is a piece of idiotic cruelty; the emanation of a diseased mind. I have watched this young girl from her in-

fancy; and I believe that, should she become aware of the circumstances and conditions upon which she receives her grandfather's money, she will refuse to touch a cent of it."

"She is not to know. Some touch of mercy moved the old sinner's heart to stipulate that she is never to know his reasons for having left her during the years of her childhood to the care of strangers."

"Ah, ha! So this far-seeing man leaves a secret to the keeping of his executors, and does not take into account the hundred other people who may chance to know why Oscar Featherstone left his wife to go and die, the Lord knows where. The poor wretch took himself, weakly enough, out of the way, and the old man seems to have believed in his death. There is no mention made of him in the will?"

"No," answered Mr Smiley; "and yet, I am not at all sure in my own mind that Oscar Featherstone is dead. In case he does exist, and that his identity can be clearly proven, he has nothing to do but to claim his daughter and the estate."

"Would to God he'd come and do it, then," exclaimed Mr McStoblin. "I have been drawn into this matter against my will, and, by the by, you said something about complications."

"I am not prepared to go farther into the matter, Mr. McStoblin. We must, however, always provide for possibilities."

"Well," said Mr. McStebbins, rising from his seat, "when a man has been ferreting out possibilities as long as you have he is quite apt to find them. Pray don't trouble yourself about letting me have a share of them. When you've something tangible, that my mind can take hold of, I will try to bring my reason to bear upon it."

"We ought to be prepared at every point, sir," said the lawyer, "and, therefore, I have thought it advisable to refresh your memory with regard to old Featherstone's intentions, as expressed in his will, of which this is a copy," tapping the paper with his finger. "Should I have anything of importance to communicate, I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"FALSE FACE MUST HIDE WHAT THE FALSE HEART DOETH
KNOW."

THE ride back to Worleigh was particularly trying to Agatha; for although on the rack of great mental agony she manifested no sign of it, except in frequent fits of nervous laughter, which jarred unpleasantly upon Kitty's ear. Once Agatha turned suddenly to her and asked whether she had ever thought much about her mother.

"Yes," she answered, "a great deal within the last few weeks."

"And why within the last few weeks?"

Kitty flushed as she answered: "I imagine that no tenderness can be like that of a mother to her child—no love so complete; and I think that I am peculiarly unfortunate to be deprived of it."

Agatha looked away from her to hide her white, quivering face. She felt herself faltering in her resolution; but the remembrance of De Rousy's words checked the outburst of tenderness which trembled on her lips. She knew how greatly her safety depended upon her prudence.

and self-control. What if Oscar Featherstone should not go away? what if Hugh Wilbraham should discover her perfidy? Little did she dream that the greatest danger lay at her very threshold, coiling like a serpent about her feet. She knew not that the smiling, handsome man, who stood waiting to assist them from the carriage, bore within his breast an intent of blackest treachery and ingratitude towards herself. She marked his kindling eye as it rested upon Kitty, and she felt that her own life was over, for she counted only the years of her youth and beauty, and at that moment she scarcely knew whether to regret two days gone by, or to regret that her career was near its close. What woman would crown herself again with her beauty to watch its gradual decay, or care to live only to remember the triumphs, which all save herself have forgotten? Who would take up the sceptre, only to go through the pangs of abdication? How hard to listen to the *siffler*, when the ear has been attuned to the applause of the *troupe*. Thus mortally thought Agatha as she stood before her mirror that night, taking down her long hair. As it fell around her wan face, how thin and pallid it looked, with her large eyes dilated with passionate despair and the rouge washed from her cheeks.

"Madame," cried Babet, coming in from the dressing-room, "why do you fatigue yourself to take down your hair? You look faint; let me give you a little brandy—only a spoonful."

"No," answered Agatha, "no brandy; but you may brush out my hair. It soothes me when I am nervous."

Babet took up the long, blue-black hair in her hand, and commenced the skilful manipulations which were so agreeable to her mistress. "You are losing your health in this dull place, madame; no balls, no theatre, no *fêtes*; surely you will not stay here much longer?"

"My poor Babet," answered Agatha, "I know how much you miss your bright Parisian life. Have patience; we will go back."

"And will it be soon, madame? I am dying of loneliness here."

Agatha was silent. The *femme de chambre* watched her face reflected in the mirror. She made a mental note of the fact that madame had retired to her apartment earlier than usual; that Miss Eleanor was confined to her bed—of late a common occurrence—and that M. de Ronsy had Miss Pitkin all to himself down stairs. All this supplied food to her busy brain, and we may fairly presume that it was exceedingly nourishing to suspicion.

Agatha suddenly raised her eyes. Babet's small, cunning orbs met hers in the mirror before them. She knew what they had read on her troubled face. Agatha had invested but little belief in human virtue, and in Babet's virtue in particular. She knew thoroughly the vulnerable points of a French *femme de chambre*; that truth with them is only resorted to when falsehood fails to serve their

purpose. Fidelity means a bargain; the highest bidder will always have the better claim to it. They are scornfully incredulous of the virtue which starves and refuses silk dresses to wrap itself in a threadbare shawl and shabby gown. Babot was perhaps no worse than others of her class. Cunning, observant, and drawing conclusions based upon her experience of life, she was a dangerous enemy, and Agatha knew, to her peril, how fatal her infidelity might prove to her future security.

"My head is better now, Babot; put up my hair. I wish you to look over my dresses to-morrow. I am expecting a trunk from Paris; I shall, therefore, not want to keep many of the old ones. Make what use of them you choose; but you may as well select one of them for the pretty girl who comes here with eggs and butter."

Babot had long looked forward to this; nor was she surprised that the gift had come this night.

"*Mon Dieu!* how shall I ever thank madame?" she said. "Trust me, I will select one of the gayest for Abby. She was here to-day while you were away. So innocent! as pure and sweet as new milk to look at! But ah, bah! coquetry is born in woman, and M. Gaston doesn't know how to deny himself the pleasure of a walk with a pretty girl. Why should he?"

"Why, indeed?" said Agatha; "M. de Bousy must amuse himself."

"Do you know, madame, that there is a stranger lying

ill at the old place beyond the creek—I cannot recollect the name. A messenger has been sent for Dr. Maribel. A French woman is his sole companion, and the country people declare that he is mad. Far into the night they hear the tones of his organ, and they believe that he is playing to the ghosts that haunt the old house."

Agatha listened eagerly. She knew now that Oscar Featherstone was the inhabitant of his former home. Everything tended to bring her mind to this conclusion. The organ had been brought there for his gratification. She remembered only too well the words which had passed between his father and mother when Mrs. Featherstone, from her own purse, had indulged him in a like expensive whim. How divinely Oscar had played upon the instrument, affording the sick woman, perhaps, the only real pleasure which she ever enjoyed. A strong, wicked hope sprang up in her heart. Oscar was ill. He might die! Ah! here she saw her deliverance. He might die, and then there would be no risk of recognition—no chance that the old shameful story might be dragged from its oblivion—no fear that Kitty would learn to loathe and despise her. She had forgotten Babet's presence—forgotten that the woman's sharp eyes were reading her face.

"Madame seems much concerned about the poor gentleman," she said, winding the heavy braids around Agatha's head.

"A stranger without friends is greatly to be pitied, Babet."

"Then, madame, shall I go to-morrow and inquire about him? I should like also to see Madame Ursula, as they call her."

Here was a new danger, one which she had not foreseen. Babet must not go. Those two women together would surely work her a mischief.

"It would be indiscreet while the gentleman is so ill, Babet. In a few days, when he is better, you may go to make a visit to your countrywoman." Oh! how in her heart she hoped that Oscar Featherstone might die!

A small open brooch fell to the floor—she had carelessly fastened her *priguer* with it. Babet picked it up and handed it to her.

"Take it Babet," Agatha said. "There is a defect in the pin; I can never keep it on. No thanks. Faithful service deserves reward. Remember this."

The woman's eyes deepened in their subtle expression as she glanced covertly into Agatha's face.

"Madame may rely upon my gratitude and fidelity," she said, as she was leaving the room.

"Yes," groaned Agatha, when the door had closed behind her. "Yes, I may count upon your greed and exactions. She knows that I have a secret. God help me!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"WHY, THEN, THE MAID IS MINE FROM ALL THE WORLD."

AT the earnest entreaty of Agatha, Kitty had consented to pass the night at Worleigh. She had read the wish in Gaston's face and dared not thwart him. On the plea of fatigue, Agatha retired while Gaston and Kitty went out on the piazza, attracted thither by the beauty of the night—a summer night with the stars shining down upon the fructifying earth, and the black shadows creeping into mysterious forest depths, where dusky forms are stealing with preying intent, and the mottled fawn treading timidly in the wake of its antlered sire. The feet of the grazing ox sink down into the tender grass, and the deep-mouthed hound bays as the belated negro swain whistles softly to himself, thinking of his *salida Dulcinea*. Everywhere the whispers of the night—soft echoes dying away down the valleys, where the creek

"Makes sweet music with th' enamel'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage."

The great world with its million of throbbing hearts

and fevered brains—its millions of human joys and sorrows, its millions sleeping in childhood innocence, its millions bending with want and crime; the great revolving world, pregnant with humanity, was giving rest to her weary children—rest and merciful forgetfulness.

"Will you come with me?" Gaston said, gently placing Kitty's hand upon his arm. "The night is so fair." They walked to and fro the length of the long piazza. The "white wonder" of Kitty's hand resting confidently on Gaston's arm. How could she know, innocent child that she was, that an exquisite susceptibility to outward influences, and the tender sensibility of a loving, untried heart are dangerous qualities under the subtle guidance of an unscrupulous and unprincipled man.

She listened with pleasurable sensation to the softly modulated voice, and her heart began to throb wildly as his manner grew more tender.

"How pleasant it is to look at you," he said; "I have studied your face so closely that even here in the starlight I can read it. Will you permit me? may I tell you what I have read there?"

She did not answer, and he went on: "Generous and warm in your attachments, there is just enough romance in your nature to make you idealize the happy being who may be so fortunate as to possess the treasure of your love. You are still so young—so fresh in experience—so winningly ignorant of the world! Ah! I gladly turn from

the remembrance of women who possess all the insouciant freedom—the grace and high breeding of the *beau monde*, to dwell with pleasure upon your artless modesty—that natural loveliness which few women retain after they have brushed away the first bloom of innocence. Shall I continue?" he whispered, bending down his face close to hers.

No answer was needed. He felt the little hand trembling on his arm—he marked the downcast eyes, the quivering lip, and he knew that his victory was well-nigh won.

"Catherine," she started and looked up at him. For the first time in her life she had been called by her real name. "Catherine, do you know that you are really beautiful? Through long years of wanderings I have never seen a face that I think so perfect in outline, so delicately rich in coloring; but it owes its dearest charm to the innocence and purity that come from your speaking eyes. I believe that you are just as God intended a woman to be. Fresh from His hands, I would——" He had taken her hand within his own. His words were stayed upon his lips. There was something so like desecration in touching the soft, white hand that, unprincipled as he was, he felt awed in the presence of her virginal modesty. "Catherine, dearest," he continued, "I would take you just as you are, and feel myself blessed in your possession. I have pleaded long; take pity on me, for I love you."

She was fascinated by his earnestness, mistaking her own heart as fatally as she mistook the character of the man. Her pitying womanhood yielded that sympathy which caused a tender compliance in her manner—a stronger heart-beat, a rapid uplifting of the eyes, which met the passionate glance of De Rouxy, and was fatal to her self-control. She felt herself powerless to resist, and as she stood thus the rapid consciousness of a desire for John Maribel's protection came over her, and with it a burning, bitter shame as De Rouxy caught her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. "You are mine now," he whispered exultingly. "Remember what I say to you this night, Catherine. You must be my wife."

Wild with awakened remorse and anguish, Kitty tore herself from his encircling arms and flew to her room. She believed that she was irrevocably bound to De Rouxy, and now in the strong revulsion of feeling she loathed him so deeply that the kiss which he had impressed upon her lips seemed like the brand of shame.

The stars had said good-by to the waking day before her sobs grew still.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"LET ME QUESTION MORE IN PARTICULAR."

URSULA FEATHERSTONE lay in the delirium of fever, murmuring names and incoherent phrases—raving of some great heart-sorrow brought back to him in fresh poignancy by the excitement of a fevered brain. His countenance was shrunken and pale, the surface of the body dry and intensely hot, the mouth parched, and the pulse frequent and bounding. Dr. Maribel knew that, besides a predisposition to febrile excitement, there had been an exciting cause in the dampness and decomposition of vegetable matter which had accumulated about the old place; and that his exposure to the miasmatic poison which "loves the ground" had brought on the attack. His diagnosis was correct as far as the symptoms of intermittent fever were defined; but the patient was certainly more prostrated than is usual with persons suffering from miasmatic fever. There was some disturbing influence at work; in all probability, mental trouble, and Dr. Maribel determined to question Ursula.

He had at once satisfied her that Mr. Featherstone's

sickness could be traced to natural causes, and that his illness was not likely to prove fatal. She was seated now in the adjoining room half asleep in the arm-chair; but drowsiness lay upon her as lightly as it does upon a cat. She was wide awake as soon as the Doctor entered the room.

"Is something wanted, *monsieur*? *Mon Dieu!* how my heart beats!"

"Calm yourself, my good woman," answered the Doctor, seating himself. "You know that I am in a great measure responsible for your master's recovery; but I am hampered by my complete ignorance of his habits and disposition, and of the circumstances which may act adversely towards that recovery. Now, the very principle and root of a physician's success is his intimate knowledge of his patient's temperament, disposition, and mode of life. There is a perfect consistency, therefore, in my desire to seek enlightenment and my position towards the patient. You understand?"

"Perfectly, *monsieur*. It is clearly my duty to tell you all that I know about my dear master." Ursule's broken language I have converted into intelligible English, as being both more agreeable to write and more comprehensible to the reader. "It is, I know," she continued, "important to his well being, to relieve his mind of the anxiety which has created so much restlessness and despondency of late. I feel certain that he has met with some

severe disappointment, and that it is very recent. I haven't served him for so many years without having learned something of his inner life. My master has had some great family trouble, and I believe this is the cause of his return to this ruined old place. His wanderings about the country have ended just as I thought they would. We must find out his trouble, Doctor, or he will die."

"Have you no clue; nothing to guide you to a discovery?" asked John Maribel.

"I have but slender material; you may, however, make something out of it. Not more than a week ago an elderly gentleman and a young lady were riding through the woods. They stopped at the spring, and with pleasing grace she asked for a drink. For days I have puzzled over the likeness which I saw in her face—a likeness which I could not trace, and I have vainly tormented myself striving to recall some face in the past whose features are impressed upon my memory. Yesterday morning when my master came creeping into the house at dawn, half dead with fatigue, I brought him a cup of coffee. He had seated himself and I stood before him. As he raised his eyes I saw it all. The same large, dark, tender eyes; so luminous, so beautiful!

"Did you tell your master of this likeness?"

"I dared not. It may be that I have been mistaken; but I have not been idle. See what I have!"

She drew the old letter from her pocket, and opening it held it out to John Maribel. There, in faint, faded characters, was the name of "Catherine Featherstone."

"I read here," he said, "of Oscar, the son of Catherine Featherstone. She writes to her husband of the boy. The Featherstones once lived here in opulence. Some terrible family disaster caused the old man to shut up the house; and while he tenderly nursed his fortune, he also cherished a hatred of mankind, and died bereft of friends, and surrounded with the squalor of poverty, which was the more horrible because it was unreal. Oscar Featherstone has long been supposed to be dead. No one seems to know what became of his unfaithful wife, or of her child."

Ursula had listened with eager attention; now she came quite close to Dr. Maribel, and said: "*Tiens!* I have it. My master is Oscar Featherstone, and he has come here looking for his child. I tell you, Doctor, that disappointment is killing him. He will die in this old place!"

"Not so fast, my good woman. Your master has gone about his search in a blundering way. He has come back under an assumed name, surrounded himself with mystery, and has been wandering about the country like a beggar, probably putting bits of gossip together, and allowing an easy discouragement to take possession of him,

and to destroy his energy and his hopes. I feel that much depends upon the speedy unravelling of this mystery; and I shall certainly use my best endeavors to aid this unfortunate gentleman in obtaining the information which may, at least, relieve his mind from harrowing suspense. I came here once for the purpose of seeking an interview with him. Had he stayed at home, instead of risking the chance of taking the ague, he would, in all probability, have been put in possession of facts which would have been of material benefit in the further prosecution of his inquiries."

"You think, then, *monseigneur*, that all is not lost for him. You think——"

"I think," said John Maribel, "that we must first get him through this fever, and then it will be time enough to look after his moral malady. In the meantime we must be cautious. Remember that the reason, perhaps the life, of your master, depends upon your prudence. No one must be admitted to his room. You must indulge him in any whim which will turn his thoughts away from the contemplation of his family troubles, until I have something tangible—some clear facts—no suppositions. Guard against excitement; give him his medicine as directed. I must go away at daylight, but I will come again to-morrow night. I have a long fifteen miles' ride every time I come. Take good care of my patient, so that my visits may not require to be often repeated."

When the doctor left his patient at dawn, his pulse had become more natural, the delirium had ceased, and he had fallen into a tranquil sleep.

CHAPTER XL.

"BY MEDICINE LIFE MAY BE PROLONGED."

DURING the week of Mr. Featherstone's illness, John Maribel had not seen Kitty; but he had sent her a note, and received in reply a few constrained lines. He carried the little sheet of tinted paper in his pocketbook. She had signed herself "Your darling Kitty," and for this he had kept the note. To him she would always be Kitty; he could have no part in the beautiful Catherine Featherstone. There were certain things which he could not allow to be open questions; some things which he assumed to be indispensable to his own moral completeness. It never occurred to him to trifle with his soul or his honor, or to run the terrible risk of temporizing with either.

While on his way to visit Mr. Featherstone he overtook Colonel Covington riding, as was his habit, at a gentle pace.

"I suppose you have been to Riverside, Colonel, looking

at the crop," said John, extending his hand to the old gentleman.

"Yes; I generally get out by daylight. I can't endure the sun. How is your patient?"

"Progressing fairly. I hope soon to have him on his legs again; but his constitution is frail, and he is laboring under great mental depression."

"I hear that he is a foreigner," said Colonel Covington. "Is it not somewhat singular that a stranger should have come to this quiet neighborhood and chosen that ruinous old place as his residence?"

"Yes," answered John, "and one cannot help surmising that his choice of residence was dictated by a motive, which I think must also influence his eccentric conduct. A casual observer might easily mistake his peculiar idiosyncrasies for the vagaries of an unsound mind; but he is simply an unhappy being, who has taken much to heart some family trouble."

"Well, the case is more serious than I thought, Doctor; but if a little neighborly kindness can in any way comfort him, I am sure Mrs. Covington will be only too glad to be of service. Nobody is better in a sick-room, or more in their element, than she is when she is permitted to coddle a patient; but I rather think that she prefers convalescents whom she can feed freely with broths and jellies. I shall do myself the pleasure of calling as soon as I have your permission, provided

your recluse does not abjure the society of his neighbors."

"I flatter myself," said John, "that I have discovered a mode of moral treatment which will restore Mr Pultney to a more natural and happy condition of mind. I will be much disappointed should he not welcome you most heartily, sir, when you do him the honor to visit him."

"I tell you, Maribel," and Colonel Covington turned in his saddle and looked at John, "that if I didn't believe that Oscar Featherstone was dead, I should say that *he is the man*. Well do I remember him as a boy—a shy, sensitive youngster, the darling of a foolish, doting mother, and antagonistic at every point to his father, who would have had him shoulder his way through the world, instead of spending his time playing the organ and cultivating art, which was to him an absorbing, intellectual enjoyment. We really have no positive evidence of Oscar's death. It is one of those things which people have accepted without question; possibly, because it does not readily occur to them that a living man could voluntarily throw up a fine inheritance."

"Then his death is a mere hypothesis, based upon a one-sided mode of reasoning," replied John.

"God bless my soul! Doctor," exclaimed Colonel Covington, "what are we coming to?"

"Merely to the other side of the question," replied John Maribel. "It seems that young Featherstone

possessed a highly imaginative temperament and a most unpractical turn of mind. Now, to a man leading a purely ideal life, and to whom the contemplation of the highest orders of genius gave a standard which would make him painfully alive to anything which might lower him in his own estimation, or disgrace him in the eyes of the world, the renunciation of his father's wealth is really not so surprising."

"Then you suspect that Oscar Featherstone lives?" said the old gentleman.

"Take my surmises, Colonel, for what they are worth. You know that I am deeply concerned in Kitty's welfare, and that from the fact of her having been confided to my care by old Featherstone, I have always imagined that the time would come when the matter would be cleared up, and she would have her right position in the world."

"Most heartily will I join you, Doctor, in bringing this about. Kitty is the sweetest and dearest of girls, and we must look well after her."

The roads separated here, and they parted, both of them, with hearts full of anxious thought and deep concern for the future of sweet Kitty Pitkin. In a few days, Mr. Smiley had informed John Maribel, Kitty would be of age; and on that day of her majority she would be put in possession of certain facts relating to her family. On this day John Maribel would go to Mr. Featherstone—of whose identity he scarcely entertained a doubt—and give

him the intelligence which would relieve his heart of harassing suspense, and would prove a better elixir than all the tonics which "tone and invigorate the system, dispel gloom, and rejuvenate the entire man."

He was slowly retracing his way back to town, his bridle lay loosely on the neck of his horse, his heart filled with those thoughts which come in hours of contemplation, bringing back to it the mysterious rapture which sometimes, even amidst the world's hard realities, throbs the soul like a divine *fugue*, alternating its delicious melody with the joyous treble of happiness and the solemn bass of deeper and more anxious feeling. The hard working, middle-aged doctor was actually allowing himself to dream of what might have been—to picture to himself a fair young life linked to his—to grow tender in the contemplation of this delightful picture, when, as it often happens, the reaction was at hand. A most unpleasant reality awaited him at the turn of the road. Directly before him two persons were walking—a man and a woman. His horse was already within a few yards of them, when with undisguised haste they withdrew into the denser shadow of the trees which bordered the road. John had stayed a longer time than usual with Mr. Featherstone, so that he was late returning. By the fading twilight he caught sight of the girl's white face and recognized Abby Blackwell. The slight, elegant figure by her side was certainly not that of Perry Deane. Remember-

ing Perry's altered looks, and associating these with the fact that he had not seen him since their meeting by the creek, he deduced a conclusion which caused him real pain. It was one of John Maribo's best characteristics that he could put aside self and enter largely into the troubles of others, and as he rode on he thought of his humble friend's heart-sorrow with a dim foreboding of what its consequences might be to him.

CHAPTER XLI.

"WOULD IT NOT MAKE ONE WEEP?"

A HALF consumed light-wood knot smouldered on the hearth of the farm kitchen; now and then the flame catching the resin in the wood, would shoot up into momentary brightness and then die away, leaving the room in demi-obscurity.

Joep sat on a low stool close beside the chimney, leaning his head against the mantelpiece. He was sitting there ostensibly to keep the pot of coffee from boiling over; for Blackwell and his wife had gone to a prayer-meeting, and Abby, as we have seen, was hiding in guilty terror

under the black shadows by the road-side. Jope was vexing himself now over the question of his future prospects. He had pursued towards his uncle a conciliatory course of conduct, prompted, not so much by a desire to please the old man, as by a motive which lay deeper and which was, indeed, the moving power of all his actions—his humble devotion to Kitty. Conciliation, however, is not abandonment of principle; and Jope thought often with regret, as he practised his steps on the barn floor, of the waste of talent, the loss of opportunity and the weary sameness of his farm-work. If he had delivered himself up to the special pleading of his absorbing passion he would have made up his bundle and once more braved the ire of Uncle Mark; but Jope, with no very marked faculty of observation, was nevertheless in possession of certain facts which he turned about in his mind, arriving at last, by the slow process of reasoning, at conclusions which could not have been juster had they been evolved by the most accomplished logician.

However incompatible selfishness may be with the rigid carrying out of Solomon's teachings, it was, I am sorry to say, a strong ingredient of Mark Blackwell's character. It had been Jope's misfortune all his life to be quietly taken possession of and manipulated without the slightest regard to his claims to more generous treatment. There seemed to be work ever ready at hand for him, and if it was any satisfaction to him to know it, he never ate the

bread of illencea, or lay down at night to moralize over unspent time. He generally went to sleep too thoroughly tired even to give a reproachful thought to his exacting uncle.

He had returned from town that morning, having gone thither the night before to take some farm produce to market. Profiting by this occasion he made a visit to Nellie Shea at Doctor Mariba's back gate.

"You mind what I say to you, Jope Perkins," Miss Shea had said, as she warmed over the family affairs. "Things is going every which way with Doctor John. Never a downright decent meal has he eat since Mrs. Kitty's been away. Is it any wonder for a man to grow thin on cold vittals? And there's Mrs. Parrot, as cross as ever was, and counting the lumps of sugar as if Doctor John couldn't afford to buy the best superfine by the barrel, and having a strange woman stealing in here as never was a ghost, if she'd swear to it on the Bible."

"Nellie," remarked Jope, in rather an insinuating way, "you know my weakness where women is concerned. I've got an unfortunate soft heart."

This declaration was not without its effect upon Miss Shea. She moved a little nearer to Jope, and looked at him with an air of expectancy.

"Yes, I may say," continued Jope, "that I have injured my own prospects by letting myself run—if I may use a figure—into sugar and water, when I ought to

have gone into sinew and muscle. Yes, Nellie, I believe that sinew and muscle would have been the making of me; and instead of getting a name for myself, I am only catching the dew and the sun, and Uncle Mark's ding-dong about Solomon, as I wish no such man had ever set himself up for a model. I take it, it was a good while ago as he said them things. The world's got around pretty often since then; but, as I was a saying, I've stood in my my own light all along of my softness towards them as I love better than myself."

He paused and looked at Nellie. Now Nellie was what Mrs. Parrott called an archetypal old maid; one of those, who—to use a quaint, foreign saying—was doomed to comb St. Catharine's hair. These maidens are proverbially susceptible, and are ever dreaming of hypothetical husbands. Nellie was no exception to the rule. Although she had never associated Jope with ideas of marital felicity, she very naturally applied his remarks to herself, and was fairly falling into a sympathetic softness, which kept her silent now, causing her to assume a conscious air, and to forget that Mrs. Parrott was waiting for her tea.

"I can't exactly see what's come over you, Nellie," said the innocent Jope. "I never seen you before when you didn't have a word that was ready to come out, just as if it had been hanging on to the end of your tongue, awaiting the chance to slip off. However, I may as well

say that I came here to-night to talk to you in a particular and confidential way. You and I has known each other this long while, Nell, and I believe as how you can be trusted."

"Who, if not me?" Nellie moved a little nearer. "Trusted, as never was, Jope. I tell you if Nellie Shee don't know how to make a penny grow, nobody does. I say penny, just as a kind of a figure, Jope, like the sugar and water—for we don't have them, you know. I've got a ready ear and a still tongue, Jope, and a——"

"A what, Nellie?"

"A—a—loving heart, Jope, as 'don't take no account of being a few years older. Years don't mean nothing with a woman as can be trusted and has got a head for saving."

"What on the earth do you mean?" exclaimed poor Jope, taking a step backward and instinctively drawing himself far as possible from Nellie's arms. A love of liberty urged him to this ungallant action.

"What do I mean?" shrieked the furious woman.

"I mean that you are an imperent, false-tongued noddle-head, as you always was—the *noddlest* of heads—as come to back gates enticing of innocent women to lose their characters, talking with two sides to your words, and trying to deceive a lone woman."

"It's you that are a deceiving of yourself, Miss Shee, and if I talk with two sides to my words—which I didn't

know before, and much obliged for the information—why, you have got at the wrong side, that's all. I have been talking about her as I would have her to walk over my dead body and take it kindly of her, and have suffered impositions and suspicion as never a young man put up with, and you—why, what do you take me for, Nellie Sack, to be coming spooning over you, as might have been my mother, or at least my oldest aunt, with such stuff and nonpareil as I'd be ashamed to be guilty of?"

He had gradually receded as he talked until he had placed a safe distance between himself and the mortified and indignant Nellie.

"You poor, pitiful object," she hissed at him. "You double-faced villain! oh! oh! oh!" She let off these interjections like pistol-shots, as if she intended each one to strike him to the heart, and it certainly was not her fault if he did not fall down there dead before Dr. Mari-bel's gate, an edifying example to young men who talk with two sides to their words. Jope was was very hot and uncomfortable as he thought over this scene now in the dim kitchen, with the old clock going tick-tack, tick-tack, over his head. "Oh!" he thought, "a poor, foolish boy like me, is always a blundering when he means to do right!"

He rose to his feet, and turning round was face to face with Abby, who had come softly in at the door.

"Did I frighten, you, Jope?"

"Your comings and goings ain't much to be calculated on these days, Abby," he answered.

"Jope," she said, quite humbly, "don't you be saying nothing, or casting blame on me, not at least to-night, I can't stand it."

She sat down on the settle, and throwing her apron over her head, burst into tears.

"Whatever has happened to you, Abby?" said Jope, moved by her low sobbing. "I'm your own cousin, and you needn't keep anything from me, leastways, anything that I can help you in. Is it something you're got on your mind, as you'd like to speak to a friend about, as is a real, true friend to you, Abby?"

"My heart w'il just burst, Jope," she answered, uncovering her face. "Oh, Jope, I'm that troubled that I don't know what to do. You'll help your poor cousin, won't you, Jope?"

"As God is my witness, I will, Abby; only tell me what I can do for you."

"It isn't much that anybody can do," she answered between her sobs. "Perry hasn't come here since last Sunday, Jope. We had some words together. I thought he wanted to be masterful with me. I didn't behave well, and I've been going wrong, I know I have, listening to idle words and a lying tongue—and it was all for trash like this!" She dragged the ruby ring from her finger, and dashed it into the furthest corner of the kitchen.

"I shut my ears to father's warnings and mother's advice. My poor, poor, old mother! and, oh! Jope, I've lost my good name forever. I swear to you that I don't deserve it; but I've lost it, Jope, and Perry will hear of it, and I'm undone!"

Jope stood looking at the wretched girl, his face livid with agitation, and he was trembling in every limb. "Abby," he said, "tell me again that you've done nothing worse than to listen to a lying tongue, and I'll believe you—tell me again, Abby. You've no call to deceive me, your own cousin."

"I've been foolish, Jope—foolish, and weak, and wicked as can be, and I know that I've lost an honest man's love, as has always dealt fair and honorable by me. I'll tell you the truth, Jope. I was down by the creek to-night. I oughtn't to have gone, but I was led on like. You know who I went there to meet—you and everybody else know. We was walking—just walking along the road, Jope, and I was uneasy and sorry that I had come, and he told me that he coul'n't come again, and made me promise to make up with Perry, and said other things, Jope, as I shouldn't a listened to, because I am promised to a good man—a good and true man as ever was, Jope, and as we was walking, Dr. Mariled passed by and, oh, my God! he saw me. It seems to me now that I can see his horrified face; he is Perry's best friend. Perry thinks there never was anybody like him. I've told you all the truth, Jope

—every word just as it happened, only I have not said that the villain wanted to buy me off not to say anything that Kitty Pitkin could hear; he wanted to buy me off, Joep, after he has taken away my good name and ruined me forever. Don't you see, Joep," she moaned, walking to and fro, swinging her hands, "don't you see that I'm forever undone, for nobody is a going to believe me but you. You do, don't you, Joep?"

Poor fellow, he was quite bewildered with grief and consternation, but in his own simple, downright reasoning he began to see that there was but one way out of Abby's difficulties, and this entailed on her part a most mortifying and humiliating confession. He believed in her sincere repentance, and he believed also that her grief must touch Perry's heart and obtain his forgiveness, taking for granted that she would tell him the truth. So he said to her: "I will do the best I can for you, Abby; I'll try to set things right, if it can be done. Don't you fret and go on so dreadful. I can't keep my feelings under, and my head is whirling as if I was hanging over some awful precipice, and was struggling to keep from falling into the black gulf below."

"Things is so wrong with me, Joep," said Abby, "so wrong that I don't see as anybody can help me; and there's father! Oh, if Perry casts me off, he'll never forgive me!"

"It's no use a making of yourself sick with fretting,

Abby. Go to bed and try to make yourself easy. I've always found that it is comforting-like to remember that we have a Father who takes account of His children. Just you ask of Him, Abby; to do some thing for you. I'll go over to Oaklands at daylight and see Perry. He loves you, Abby, and won't be too hard on you. You must ask his forgiveness and——"

"Oh, Jope, I could never, never do that. The shame of telling him would kill me. He is the kind of man as has straight notions about the way a girl should keep faith with the man as she's promised to, and he wouldn't believe me, not if I swore to him on my knees that it was all for love of slavery, and that I love him better than the grandest gentleman as ever was."

The shutting of the gate warned her of the approach of her parents, and escaping to her room upstairs, she heard them come in and ask anxiously about her.

Jope told them that she was tired from her day's ironing and had gone to bed.

CHAPTER XLII.

"DROWNED! OH, WHERE?"



PERCY crept down stairs while it was still starlight. Going to the stable he saddled Brown Betty, and cautiously opening the barn gate, mounted her and rode away with a heavy heart and a mind sorely at ease. He knew that Perry held strong views about honorable dealing, that he chose no middle ground between right and wrong, and that his anger against Abby was justified by his outraged love. In his simple mind there were two extremes necessarily opposed to each other—a courageous determination to help his cousin, and a faltering dread of his inability to plead her cause, which he knew to be a weak one. Riding along in the chill dawn, with the gloom of a gathering storm hanging like a pall about him, he almost repented him of his promise to Abby.

When he reached Oakland the rain was pouring in a steady torrent. Sabra, the cook, espied him and cried to him, as she stood at the kitchen door: "Lord bless you, Mr. Perkins! You is drenched, to be sure. Come right in and dry yourself. I'll have a cup of coffee ready in a

minute. Never mind the floor, that can be wiped up; but it ain't so easy getting the ague cured when it takes the right hold on you, and the rheumatics creeps into the marrow of your bones with the damp."

Jope gratefully accepted the cup of coffee, and unheeding the danger of ague said that he would go at once to look for Perry.

"You ain't come here to see Mr. Deane?" exclaimed Sabra, with a look of astonishment. "Why, he's gone away."

Jope's heart sank. "Gone away, Sabra? Particular business brought me here this morning, and you say he's gone away?"

"Yes, and de Lord only knows where he's gone to. Master is mightily worried about him; for you see he's the sort of man as people takes to, but he ain't bin like himself sence a while back. He's done give up the job here, and another man has come in his place. It seems like nobody dunno where he's gone to."

"I am much obliged to you, Sabra," answered Jope, too sick at heart to question her further. "Good-day to you; I'll be getting back to Hillside."

"You ain't crazy, Mr. Perkins, to start in this rain; and breakfast is most ready?"

"I must be off, Sabra. Uncle will be worrying about the mare."

In spite of the increasing storm he set out for home.

The hissing rain drove into his face, half blinding him, while rushing torrents swept down the hill-sides, wearing the yielding earth into deep gullies. Setting spurs to the mare he urged her to greater speed, and the brave animal, with ears set back and eyes dilated, moved onward through the storm. The creek which separated Hilside from Worleigh was a broad, shallow stream, fordable during the most part of the year, but likely to swell into a formidable torrent when during the sudden and violent rain-storms common in the summer season it received from its tributaries their overplus of water. As the torrent subsided as suddenly as it rose, it had not been thought worth while to make a substantial bridge. Present security often arrogates authority over prudent foresight. So a slight structure only had been thrown across for the convenience of the neighborhood. This had now completely disappeared. Jope saw with dismay the volume of rushing water, swift and turbid, carrying everything before it in its irresistible course. The mare shivered and stuck her feet into the earth with a determination which expressed her unwillingness to plunge into the angry flood; and Jope was far from contemplating an act of heroic folly which would have given her an opportunity of describing the dying struggles of Brown Betty and the miraculous escape of her rider. No, as every sensible person would have acted under the circumstances, Jope determined to go back to Worleigh and wait there until the ford became

passable. He tightened rein and touched the mare with the spur, but as she sprang forward he drew her up suddenly and leaped to the ground.

A great cry went out through the forest—a cry that rose above the mullen roar of the water and the noise of the storm.

Jopu had seen the white face, the long floating hair, and the garments of a woman borne swiftly down the stream. An appalling dread stunned him for a moment; and then he ran along the bank striving to catch a glimpse of the figure, intending without thought of risk to his own life to attempt the rescue of the unfortunate woman. He ran, falling to the earth when his feet became entangled in the trailing vines or protruding roots, then rising with desperate haste to continue his arduous course. In the meantime the rapid torrent had borne the woman onward, and he had lost sight of her.

About a quarter of a mile from the ford the creek made a curve, and a great sand-bank jutting out formed a sort of promontory. Against this the current had carried a quantity of drift-wood. There, caught in an intricate network of roots and branches—there, with her long hair floating on the water, her white breast bared, and the cruel flood lashing her tender limbs—there Jopu saw his cousin Abby. She was dead; but oh! the cruel, cruel sight! Alone he could not extricate her, and where was he to look for help. He might go to seek it, but could he

leave her there? "Oh, my God! my God!" he prayed, "send me some help! Must I stand here and see her mangled and torn to pieces. Abby, my poor Abby!"

He shouted for help, he prayed to God, and he waited. In answer to his prayers he heard a far-off response, then minutes like lagging hours dragged by, until he saw a figure emerge from the woods on the opposite bank. To this side the current had taken the unfortunate girl. The man wore no hat, his soaked garments clung to his emaciated form, and wild, haggard eyes looked out from a mass of tangled beard and hair. In this wild, desperate-looking figure, Jope recognized Perry Deane.

He did not at first see the dead girl. He was looking across at Jope; but his eyes followed the boy's horrified gaze and fell upon Abby. Then a frenzy seemed to possess him. He could reach her from where he stood by stooping forward; but the drift had jammed her firmly in the network of logs and roots, and branches laden with soddened moss, and it was only by superhuman effort that she could be extricated. Plunging into the water, he tore away the interlacing mass, and lifting her in his brawny arms, with a mighty effort bore her to the bank. Kneeling beside her tenderly, with trembling hands he drew together the remnants of her garments, turning away his head while he covered her bare, snowy breast with the coat which he had taken off.

His face was fixed and hard. Jope shuddered as he

watched him. Not a moan, not a tear, as he bent over her livid face, and closed the great staring eyes. He grasped for a moment the cold, limp hand, and saw that the ruby ring was gone; his own golden circlet was there instead.

There was a break in the dull sky; the storm was abating. Jopie bethought him that about two miles further down the stream on the public road a substantial bridge spanned it, and as its timbers were stout, it had, in all probability, withstood the storm. If he could cross there it would take him but a short time to get to Hill-side. To his great joy he found the bridge standing. The water was level with the arch, and the flooring on each side was covered to the distance of several feet. He advanced cautiously, holding by the railing, and at every step expecting the trembling structure to give way under his feet. The passage being safely performed, he set out at a brisk pace towards Hill-side. Retracing his way up the creek, and cutting across the woods at the nearest point, he soon—too soon, found himself breathless and exhausted at his uncle's gate.

Blackwell had that morning, with unwonted indulgence, permitted Abby to rest undisturbed. "Young folks love to sleep, mother," he said, "and it's no harm giving them a chance now and then. There's not much to do on such a morning."

Black Sam came running in to tell the old man that

Jape had taken the mare. The fear of loss aroused a lurking fiend in the heart of Mark Blackwell, and he exclaimed in the hard, decided tone of a man who is not in the habit of allowing charity to impugn the quality of his judgment, "He's off agair, wife, and this time the rascal has taken my best horse." The hours wore away, and she, whom they believed to be sleeping upstairs in the sound, sweet slumber of girlhood, was being torn and lacerated in the boiling flood. She, who so few days before rejoiced in the exuberant beauty of her eighteen years, lay with her wet garments clinging to her rounded limbs, her auburn hair soaked and matted, her features marred by the cruel manner of her death. I will not attempt to describe the scene which followed. The depths of a voiceless grief are hidden from the looker-on. It has many phases; but perhaps the darkest of all is when the possibility of good which is to be the fruition of his trial is shut out from the heart of man, when he is blind to God's love, defiant and unreconciled to the treatment which he has met with at His hands.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"DEAD, ART THOU DEAD?—ALACK! MY CHILD IS DEAD!"

MEN gathered in groups about the door of Blackwell's house, while the weeping women crowded the room where the body of the unfortunate girl was laid out, and where the wretched father sat with bowed head, and features set in an expression of sombre despair. The stain upon his child's fair name, the horrible and mysterious manner of her death, created in his mind a tumult of hard, bitter self-reproach, which, mingled with wilful regret at her loss, and a burning desire for vengeance, had well-nigh unsettled his intellect. Meantime, the preparations for Abby's interment were completed. The coffin was borne before the tottering old man to the grave, which had been dug in a corner of the church-yard. John Maribel, with pale and grief-stricken face, had joined him at the gate, and placed his arm within his own. This act of friendly sympathy moved him as the words of consolation which had been poured into his ears for the last few hours had failed to do. Tears—blessed tears—coursed down his furrowed cheeks, while his large

frame shook and quivered as sobs and groans burst from his agonized heart.

While the coffin was being lowered into the grave, and friends and neighbors stood in mournful silence awaiting that solemn realization of mortality which is conveyed to the senses with vivid and awful significance by the dull, hollow thud of that first spadeful of earth falling upon the coffin-lid, Blackwell started forward, and raising his trembling hands to heaven, exclaimed, in the words of divine pity:

"Father, forgive her, for she knew not what she did!"

A fervent "Amen" fell from the lips of the bystanders; and, sustained by this outburst of sympathy, the wretched father remained beside the grave until a mound of earth was all that marked the resting-place of her whose beauty had been the talk of all the country-side, and whose terrible death afforded a theme for special prayers that night in many a country home—prayers that went straight to God, purified by the incense of charity, and pleading eloquently for the erring girl. There were other prayers which miscarried on their heavenward journey—dead prayers, which were but the outbursts of self-congratulatory satisfaction, and whose "Amens" were but the epitome of human conceit and hypocrisy. The heart of man has not changed since the Pharisee thanked God that he was not as other men. The Evangelist tells us that he prayed "thus with himself," conveying in these

simple words all that need be said as to the efficacy of such supplications.

Jerusha Brown, a neighbor and connection, had stayed at home with the half-crazed mother, and when she saw Blackwell alighting from the wagon at the farm-gate, she ran forward to meet him; but as she caught sight of his face a great fear came over her.

"Uncle Mark," she cried, "Uncle Mark!"

He paused, stretching out his hands toward the desolate home, and in a deep, solemn voice, said: >

"The eye also which saw her shall see her no more; neither shall her place any more behold her." -

Jerusha stood for a minute gazing at the stricken old man as if trying to take in the awful meaning of his scriptural quotation; then, with a loud sob, she threw her apron over her face, and sinking on a bench beside the door, moaned and wept, rocking herself to and fro, as if keeping measure to her sobs.

To a man like Blackwell the loss of his respectability was a crushing blow; for poor Abby's giddiness and imprudence had, as is the common practice of the world, been perverted into a serious dereliction from duty; and the manner of her death helped to give reason to uncharitableness.

He who had ever walked uprightly before men must bow his gray head now to the very dust; he whose words were listened to with reverent respect, whose opinions

were sought by old and young, must keep silent now; for the name of Blackwell would be a by-word in all the country, and the finger of scorn would be pointed at the man who had failed to carry out in his own family the severe precepts which he gave to others—who had failed to see the pitfall at his own door, while he warned others of their danger, and had allowed his own child to walk into the jaws of a dishonoured death, stubbornly believing that the ramparts of respectability which he had reared around his family were impregnable. While his eyes were fixed upon the solid heights which years of probity and uprightness had raised above him, the enemy had secretly undermined his foundations, and he stood humbled and stricken amid his ruins.

Perhaps young Goodman Brown was not more astonished at seeing Deacon Gookin in questionable company, than was this stern old man to find, when through the sanctifying influence of his deep grief, the veil of self-confidence was torn from his eyes, that for many long years he had been quietly faring along with the same dark companion, complacently satisfied with his Bible knowledge and the ready expounding of texts the very spirit of which he did not understand. Here I may say that Mark Blackwell's case is by no means an isolated instance of that species of self-deceit which lurks in dangerous proximity to religious observance. The subtle working of certain outward influences towards a respectable kind of

hypocrisy, which imposes no less upon the person himself than upon the world in general, is perhaps but a sequence of human proneness to deceit and its liability to fall into sin. When a man begins to see that he has been carrying out a cunning plot of the devil—that his doctrine, to him at least, has been but an ingenious hypothesis framed to trace the footprints of worldly observance, instead of the true essence of godliness, then he has a hard battle to fight, and wins it, to find himself bleeding and bruised, crying out for mercy, thirsting, for the first time, for the water of life, "clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."



CHAPTER XLIV.

"SEE, THERE SHE LIES."



HE grave-digger throw down his spade and shovel beside the damp mound which covered all that was mortal of Abby Blackwell, as is customary with negroes, who always leave their implements beside a newly-made grave. Whistling a solemn hymn-tune the man walked down the road towards the mill; and when

he was well out of sight, Perry Deane, coming from the opposite direction, paused a moment, looking carefully about him, and then entered the church-yard.

Long shadows were creeping over the graves, and the tall column with its broken shaft looked like a gigantic sentinel guarding the homes of the dead. Perry went straight to the lonely corner where they had laid Abby.

He stood looking at the grave, uttering no word, nor sob, nor sigh. Now moving a few steps nearer, now making a retrograde motion, as if under the spell of some horrible fascination. In his movements his foot struck against the spade, and, as if this accident had exerted some humanizing influence, or, at least, had led him to an idea which would give activity to a hitherto lurking impulse, he seized it and commenced cutting away and shaping the mound, smoothing and rounding it with deliberate care. This done, he cut out squares of sod and proceeded to cover the grave with them, and then cleared away the weeds and lumps of earth thrown out in the digging. His work completed, he stood contemplating it with the same hard gaze in his tearless eyes—a dumb, despairing grief which could find no outlet.

"All the passions," with an old writer, "are such near neighbors that if one of them is on fire, the others should send buckets." The passion of hate is often stimulated to work its direct mischief by the fuel fed to it by outraged and disappointed love. As Perry stood there beside

Abby's grave, he was perhaps alive but to one mastering impulse, and that was a desire for speedy vengeance. His love lay buried beneath the sod at his feet; but the burning hate which maddened his brain had an object upon which to expend itself.

For months he had been under the influence of one of those passions that sometimes take possession of a heart, seeming in its violence to be indemnifying itself for loss of time. Love in middle age dies hard. In youth it is a fever, hot and throbbing while it lasts, but yielding readily to treatment and leaving the patient no worse for the paroxysm. In middle age its symptoms are insidious and deep-seated. In many cases they predominate over other phenomena, and instead of being symptoms, really become a disease.

In Perry's case it had slowly yielded to the lancinating agony of suspicion; but the deep wrong which he had suffered was almost forgotten in the greater harm which had befallen the young girl who was to have been his wife. She lay there in the foulsome grave, hid away forever from his sight. A deep sense of injustice hardened his heart into defiant grief.

The shadows grew blacker and the gloaming faded into night. Like one blind, the miserable man walked away, stumbling over the graves and never once looking behind him. He took the road to Worleigh.

The flood of the day before had swept away the fence

and inundated the lower portion of the grounds. The earth was still wet and yielding, but the creek, so lately a raging torrent, was now scarce a foot deep. Perry dashed into the stream and waded across. On reaching the opposite bank he walked straight on, never pausing or looking about him, as if in doubt about what he intended doing.

The library, which was situated in the left wing of the house, had been added to the main building by the present possessor. It was a handsome apartment, parallelogram-shaped with windows coming down to the floor, and the ceiling consisting of a broad, flat panel in the centre was surrounded with a frescoed border.

Bookcases, pictures, busts, and all the *bimbeloterie* contents that a man who has taste for such things and money to gratify it can so easily accumulate, filled the room. A lamp hung from the ceiling casting its soft light over carving and bronzes and pictures. In the midst of this luxury, seated on a low chair, was Kitty with folded hands and downcast eyes looking grieved and troubled.

Perry saw her from where he stood; he took in every detail of her figure—the white dress with the delicate lace about the throat, the small hands, the coils of blond hair, and even the slipped foot just showing beneath the hem of her dress. He was trying to identify this graceful, elegant figure with Mother Pitkin's blithesome darling, and as he gazed, a hard pain caught at his heart, rising in his

throat, and taking away his breath. The possibility of a great heart-sorrow had never associated itself in his mind with John Marbel; now, familiarized with its acutest pangs, he comprehended what might be in store for this man whom he loved, and whose generous, unselfish nature would accept uncomplainingly the pain of a bitter disappointment. He carried in his breast pocket the means of wreaking vengeance upon the man who had wronged him—who had turned aside the current of a decent and respectable life and caused him at that moment to be prowling in a gentleman's grounds with the intent of a midnight assassin, but even as he looked, the subtle influence of noble example created in his darkened mind a reaching upward scarcely defined, yet sufficiently palpable to arouse a sense of generosity towards the young and innocent being whose life might be saddened by the action which he contemplated. Subjugated by impulses, which were strong, counterbalancing weights thrown into the scale with his fierce anger and burning desire for vengeance, he turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XLV.

"EYE ON THEE! I CAN TELL WHAT THOU WOULDST DO."

AFTER the funeral, John Maribel, having looked in vain for Perry, concluded that he had left the graveyard among the first, to avoid the unpleasant scrutiny of the curious, and thus dismissing the matter from his mind he turned his horse's head towards the Featherstone place. Choosing the back entrance, he entered the house, and in passing the kitchen heard a strange voice mingling with Ursula's pleasant tones. The language being French, it was easy to guess that Babet was the visitor. Curiosity had taken Babet to see poor Abby buried, and a stronger motive had induced her to prolong her ride in order to visit Ursula. Always on the alert to turn to her own advantage whatever of discovery chanced to fall in her way, she had eagerly embraced this opportunity to find out something with regard to these strangers. Her eagerness was considerably stimulated by the knowledge of her mistress's strong opposition to her making acquaintance with Ursula. The conversation naturally turned upon Abby's sad fate, and as naturally

diverged to Worleigh and the family there. Babet fell upon De Roussy with all the acrimony of a woman who resents a man's insensibility to painstaking efforts at conquest.

"M. de Roussy knows how to play his cards, madame, and there are those whom he finds to believe in his honeyed lies; for example, this blonde whom he adores—the *méchant animal*!"

"And does the young lady love this *méchant animal*?" asked Ursule.

"Ah, bah! who knows what is in a woman's heart? and then she is but a child."

"Has *mademoiselle* no father—no mother?"

"We know the world, Madame Ursule; and that our betters have their secrets. They never guard them so well but that we find them out. Eh?"

"Good servants are blind and deaf," answered Ursule. "Fidelity is rare; but it is sometimes found among them."

"Very fine, ah! very pretty, indeed! but one must look to one's interest. You understand *le chantage*, madame, that little commission which is legitimate gain on our employer's secrets. How else, is one to put by for one's old age. My mistress has seen the world; she has lived a gay life; she is older than her husband; she is rich! Is madame happy—is she rejoiced at M. Wilbraham's return? No, only once have I seen her content of late—

only once, when she thought that M. Pultney would die. His life interferes in some mysterious way with her safety, *Voilà!*"

"My master's life!" exclaimed Ursula. "Do you mean that——?"

"I mean that it is not well for them to live in the same neighborhood. Go away from this damp old place. Your master's life will be safer anywhere else."

While walking down the avenue, on her return home, Babet's reflections were of that one-sided nature which gave a strong personality to her conclusions. A thought of the opal brooch and the dresses aroused all of gratitude of which her heart was capable, and formed an infinitesimal ingredient of the satisfaction which she felt at the result of her visit.

Meanwhile, John Maribel sat with Mr. Featherstone talking in the pleasant tone which savored almost of his former cheerfulness. Long years of practice had perfected him in what he called his "sick-room manners." He had a knack of finding out the tender places and touching them with the soothing ointment of sympathy—dealing out, at the same time, kind looks, pleasant smiles, and comforting words which, in many cases, were more efficacious than his pills and drugs. Under this treatment Mr. Featherstone was rapidly recovering his health, while his liking had expanded into a warm and appreciative esteem for the doctor.

John supplied to him, in his own strong nature, the support which he needed. A timid and uncertain manner had always strongly derogated from his success in the world, and while he was clear-sighted for things afar, and was not untouched by the divine afflatus of genius, he was but the veriest child in all matters purely practical, and his calculations wandered so wide of common sense that this want had warped and hindered him in the lofty pursuits to which he had devoted himself. There was an incompleteness about him—a stopping short of that standard which he had in his own mind, but which he was never to reach. Coupled to a man like John Maribel, a sober, practical adviser, whose solid qualities counterbalanced his more brilliant talents, he would have found the quickening impulse which he needed. As it was, throughout his whole life he had disappointed whenever he had been placed in competition. This falling short had acted adversely towards his moral vision, narrowing its scope and keeping it within the bounds of mediocrity when it should have reached the heights of success.

"Doctor," he said now, as he sat with his hands folded before him, his shoulders bent forward, and his eyes raised to John's face, "I believe that I have long needed a friend like you. For lack of a better I have depended much upon Ursule, and I must confess that she has provided a good deal of common sense, which has served me well on more than one occasion."

"A man is lucky to have a friend in a woman," answered John. "She is usually cautious, and seldom gives unsound advice. A true woman communicates to a man a certain impetus towards emulation, which, if he has the right kind of stuff in him, will help him materially in his upward journey."

"The upward journey! Ah, Doctor! to me this has been a dreary, slippery way. I have never gone forward without taking a retrograde movement. I have never dared to climb but I have fallen."

"Your unhappy domestic life has probably had much to do with this, Mr. Featherstone. Your mind and energies have been trammelled by the preponderance of an adverse influence which has strongly biased your usefulness. You tell me that you often contemplate the enjoyment which comes from the affections. Yours is, I think, a purely ideal conception of domestic happiness. Its practical realization might bring to you a severe disappointment; for even in the nearest relations with human affection we seldom find the fulfilment of expectation. Either we ask too much or give too little, or, on the other hand, have lavishly squandered our all and get but a barren return."

Mr. Featherstone's face bore an expression of newly aroused interest in this man whose bright nature had hitherto so completely contradicted the possibility of hidden cares and disappointments. "Excuse me, Doctor,"

he said, "but your words convey to me a deeper meaning than perhaps you intend. Is it possible that you, too, have suffered a heart-wound?"

"Few men arrive at middle age without some such experience; but, my dear, sir we will wreck our ship if we do not steer wide out of the shoals of sentiment. I have your promise, I believe, to accompany me to Col. Covington's the day after to-morrow?"

"Yea," he answered, "I have consented, because you have insisted, and because I firmly believe that you are not a man to speculate upon intangible fancies."

"Far be it from me to deceive you, Mr Featherstone, into false expectations. You have been long and cruelly deprived of that felicity which you are eminently constituted to enjoy, and which I have just reason to hope is now within your reach. Take courage, my friend," continued John Maribel, rising and holding out his hand to him, "I trust to God that the future has in store for you a large indemnity for the past. Good-by, until to-morrow."

CHAPTER XLVI.

"IN FAITH, 'T WAS STRANGE, 'T WAS PASSING STRANGE."

DOCTOR, one word with you," said Ursule, who had been lying in wait at the kitchen-door.

"With all my heart," he answered, following her into the room.

Ursule laid her hand upon his arm, and approaching her mouth to his ear, she whispered: "Babot has been here."

"Well?"

"Her words have alarmed me. My master must leave this place to-morrow, Doctor—I would say this very night, were it possible."

"You must explain yourself," answered John Maribel. "What danger menaces your master?"

"A woman's secret."

"Ursule, that wily Babot has been putting some nonsense into your head. How can a woman's secret affect your master?"

"It may send a pistol ball, a dagger, poison—what do I know, mon Dieu?"

John looked at her with a puzzled expression and a

keen scrutiny, which betrayed a suspicion, which I am quite ashamed to say was a most unworthy one. We must remember that for many long years he had had dealings with any number of Sairey Gamps; and these decent women had somewhat perverted his taste in feminine abstinence. I only refer to this as a possible explanation of an outrage which Ursula would most heartily have resented had she known it.

"Ursule," he said, "you use strong language. I really do not understand what you mean."

"I mean," she answered, "that Mrs. Wilbinlam is interested in getting my master out of the country, and that Babet has warned me of his danger."

John Maribel rose from his chair, the color receding from his face as he asked: "Do you know anything more, Ursule?"

"Yes, I know that you have put Miss Pitkin in the lion's den. What then—don't you see?"

He struck his hand to his forehead exclaiming: "Yes, I see my cursed folly! While I have thought myself unselfish, I have been the veriest egotist—nursing my pride at the expense of her safety. My God! at whose door lies the guilt of Abby's death? It is dreadful to think that this man will go free to repeat his crime whenever innocence and beauty come within his baneful influence."

"Doctor, pardon me!" said Ursule, "but I am most anxious for Mr. Featherstone. I must find out this

woman's secret. Remain with my master to-night; I must have time to think and to act. Ah! do not refuse my request," she added, seeing hesitation in John Markbel's face.

Compliance was rarely difficult to him, unless it involved, as on this occasion, the renunciation of that strict principle of honor which was the integer of a finely organized morality, shrinking with strong repugnance from any conceivable violation. Ursule, with no mean knowledge of human nature, divined at once that it would require a strong argument to overcome his opposition, and, like a skilful general, she attacked his weakest points.

"Doctor," she said, "have you remarked Mrs. Wilbraham's fondness for Miss Pitkin, her anxiety to have her always at Worleigh? Is this sudden *penchant* for so young a person natural--do you not suspect a motive?"

"I must confess that I am not altogether pleased at the intimacy," he answered, in a somewhat repellant tone.

"Ah, Doctor, I understand that I am taking a liberty; but I implore you to trust to my prudence and discretion. I have an idea that when I shall have discovered madame's secret, that we will know also, why she wishes Miss Pitkin to marry M. de Rousy."

"Ursule," he answered very deliberately, "your attachment to your master may lead you into false conclusions which may materially affect a woman's credit."

"I am fifty-two years old, Dr. Maribel," she answered, with a touch of dignity. "Thirty-two years of them I have served my betters in one capacity or another, and, I say it with all modesty, I believe that I have deserved their confidence and approbation. Trust to me. You will not repent of it."

So long as human nature is subject to human impulses, so long will a preponderant passion exercise its influence in balancing the pro and con of conflicting reasons. Ursule's words had aroused a feeling of keen apprehension on Kitty's account, which, joined to a deep sense of responsibility and an increasing consciousness of that love which had grown into strong and vigorous life in that intimate association of years, caused him to compromise with his scruples, and yield a consent to remain with Mr. Featherstone until the next day.

Ursule immediately set about her preparations for the morning. She sent a message to Patty Searing, asking her to come to her at daylight, and then she busied herself putting everything in order for her master's comfort, for she had little faith in Patty's capability as a cook. At nine o'clock she took her candle to go to bed. Her sleeping room was on the opposite side of the hall, just at the foot of the staircase. As she placed her hand on the knob of the lock, it rested there, while she looked up the gloomy ascent of the dark old steps that led to the ghostly solitude above. In looking, an idea came to her,

and she proceeded to ascend the stairs. This time she did not go to Mrs. Featherstone's room, but turned into a side room, the decaying boards creaking most unpleasantly under her feet. The room which attracted her to this midnight inspection had been Oscar Featherstone's, and she had well-nigh robbed it of all of its furniture in fitting up the rooms down stairs. There remained, however, a small bookcase with empty shelves, one or two chairs, and a table. The bookcase was the only promising object in the room; so to this Ursula went, determined to search through its drawers and compartments. She thought that it was more than likely that she would find some letter or scrap of paper relating to her master's courtship—something which would throw some light upon his unhappy marriage.

After a thorough examination of every shelf, Ursula poked about nervously in the corners with her fingers, to find nothing but dust. The nother part, which was a sort of cupboard, was likewise entirely empty. A projection in front, sloping downward, suggested the possibility of a desk, and after several efforts, she succeeded in raising the heavy lid, which, folding downward, revealed compartments for ink, and, between these, a longer space for paper-cutter, pen-holders, etc. Suspecting that it might contain a secret cavity, she pressed her fingers upon the bottom of the compartment, again and again trying the corners, and then with patient manipulation the whole

surface. Four or five times had the experiment been repeated, a desperate perseverance had taken possession of her and urging her to renew the effort. She held the light straight over the cavity, but the commonplace old desk refused to yield up the mystery because, in all probability, it had no mystery to reveal; so, with a feeling of disappointment, Ursula took up her candle and returned down stairs.

Her night-cap proved to be a thinking cap; for no sooner were the muslin strings tied under her chin than she bethought her of the tin box which she had found in Mrs. Featherstone's closet. What more probable than that a loving mother had possessed some token of her son's infatuation—that she had garnered some trifle which would serve now to help her, the faithful servant, in her effort to compass that son's safety.

Her very imperfect knowledge of English permitted her to do little more than read the signature of these letters, which she took out one by one, unfolding them and placing them on the table at which she was sitting. The mystic characters of the old Egyptian hieroglyphics could scarcely have been less incomprehensible to her, but at last, a sheet of thin paper fell to the floor. It had been refolded into a narrow strip and thrust in among the letters; but it was a prize—for there, in small, cramped characters, was the name of "Frances Agatha Wilbur."

Oscar Featherstone had probably left this little missive

between the leaves of a book, or in his coat pocket, and, as mothers often do, Mrs. Featherstone had preserved it. We must take for granted that its preservation argued a tender appreciation of the writer's avowed affection for her son. No such thoughts, however, passed through Ursula's brain. She uttered an articulate "*Mon Dieu*," and then by a natural train of reasoning arrived at the conclusion that she held a clue to Mrs. Wilbraham's secret. Agatha had neglected the safeguard of a complete change of name. She had evidently not calculated upon those subtle agencies which spring into action and work out with tenacious and inflexible justice the doom of retribution. She had not thought it worth while to take measures against improbable danger, and in the lapse of twenty years had learned to feel perfect security from the chance of identification with the young governess who had borne the name of Frances Wilbur.

There are those who read life as they do a book, casting away the treasures of thought—unheeding the delicate beauty of design or the cherished images of truth. They read to amuse themselves, "run over the book" to get at the story. Agatha had given but little attention to the serious readings of that great unrolling scroll on which the history of her life was traced. She knew not how much of human joy and grief, of human love and hate, were involved in her past—that past which was being dragged to light in the home which she had desecrated.

A foreign woman, unlettered, and urged by no personal interest, was there, patiently adapting the scanty material at hand to the accomplishment of her ruin.

At six o'clock, this woman, dressed in a plain alpaca gown, her cap replaced by a bonnet, and looking a decent, middle-aged body, was giving her last directions to Patty before setting out for Worleigh.

"You are to tell my master, my child, that I will return before dinner. Pray do not overdo the beefsteak, and above all, take care of the majolica cup. Do you heed, Patty? The cup out of which Mr. Putney always takes his coffee."

She had reached the corner of the house when Patty's voice recalled her. Patty was leaning from the window. Ursula looked up to the fresh young face with its crown of soft, brown hair rippling away from her white forehead. A softened light beamed from her eyes, which were circled with delicate violet rings—a sign of much weeping. There was a subdued consciousness about her which expressed the presence of some newly experienced impression—a hesitancy which grew out of a danger of being misunderstood by the foreign woman.

"Forgive me, Ma lame Ursule," she said, "for calling you back; but your road takes you by the graveyard. Would you mind giving this to Rouben for her?" and she held out a great bunch of roses. "She used to like this kind, and maybe she'll know that I sent them."

"I will do what you wish, *mon enfant*; I will place the flowers on the grave, and say a prayer for the good of her soul."

CHAPTER XLVII.

"I FOUND THIS PAPER."

ALTHOUGH preoccupied with her errand, and giving a thought now and then to her master's breakfast, Ursula still had an eye for the sweet young day, smiling coyly from behind the trees which fringed the distant hills. It was a good five miles to Worleigh, and the Scarings' mule did not differ in its amiable characteristics from mules in general. He travelled under protest, unprovoked by Reuben's hard words and harder blows into any livelier manifestation of sensibility than to break into a trot, which was the merest mockery of his good intentions, as each relapse reduced his gait to a more tantalizing slowness. When, at last, he had brought them to the side entrance at Worleigh, Ursula alighted from the wagon, leaving Reuben to wait for her. A dozen eyes caught sight of the strange woman, and a

dozen ears pricked up with eager curiosity as she asked whether she might see Babet.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; please just step in and sit down," replied a mulatto girl with oval face and large lustrous eyes. "She's gone up with madame's coffee, and will be back directly."

Babet soon appeared with the empty coffee-cup in her hand. At sight of Ursule, her flat, yellow face grew expressive of eager curiosity.

"Ah! but I am glad to see you, Madame Ursule," she exclaimed. "How good of you to come so early, just when I have an hour to spare. Do me the kindness to come to my room. We may talk there at our ease."

Once in Babet's room, Ursule proceeded to make known her errand, and as human nature has undergone no radical change since Eriphyle received the famous necklace of Harmonia, a roll of bank notes will in most cases quiet the obtrusive protests of conscience. It required no remarkable perspicuity to discover that the application of a general rule would bring out a certain result, and the offered bribe was accepted by Babet with little affectation of repugnance.

"My errand is urgent," said Ursule, "and my time is short. Let me entreat you to go at once to Mrs. Wilbraham with my request."

"Mrs. Wilbraham is quick of temper and capricious beyond anything," replied Babet, stuffing the bank notes

into her purse. "I have some experience of ladies' humors, but I am baffled at her fitful foibles."

"Mrs. Wilbraham's capricious vagaries can scarcely affect me," rejoined Ursule. "Show me the way to her room, and should you find yourself poorly paid, there are more bank-notes for the asking."

Babet's room was separated from Mrs. Wilbraham's apartments by a large closet containing wardrobes, and this opened into a dressing-room into which she now conducted Ursule.

"Say to your mistress that I come from the Featherstone place."

Babet laughed as she whispered: "Do you take me for a child? You hold madame's secret!"

"I cannot blame you," answered Ursule, "for not comprehending that there may be service without hope of reward. Your head is filled with your abominable *chantage*. It is but another name for thievery, and merits its punishment. *Eh, bien!* how much longer am I to wait?"

"Madame has been generous; but secrets are ugly things, and——"

"Your greed is not yet satisfied!" indignantly exclaimed Ursule.

"You bid me open Mrs. Wilbraham's door, do you? You are asking much—yes, very much."

"Ah!" gasped Ursule, drawing out her purse. "You

are laying up for your old age, *mademoiselle*—a worthy undertaking!" and while she spoke transferred to Babet's skinny hand another slice from the savings of years.

Agatha looked straight at Ursule as she entered the room. The need to dominate over the immediate pressure of danger which she saw in the presence of this woman, had given to her face an expression of energy which was not lost upon Ursule as she returned her glance.

"Your visit is untimely," she said, "scarcely excusable; unless——"

"Unless, madam, its object justifies its untimeliness. I come on an errand which admits of no delay."

Was Oscar Featherstone dying—was her deliverance at hand? Ursule, who had purposely left open the door of the dressing-room, went back and closed it, thus cutting off the possibility of being overheard by the pair of ears which she shrewdly guessed were well practised in eaves-dropping.

"Madame," she said, standing before Agatha and speaking in a low, but decided voice, "you perhaps divine the motive which brings me here?"

"You give me credit," answered Agatha, "for a keener degree of perception than I can honestly lay claim to. Pray explain your errand, for I decidedly object to being kept in a state of suspense."

"Then madame will excuse me if my words give pain.

I have come solely on my master's account. I am alarmed for his safety."

"Your master's safety!" exclaimed Agatha. "Why have you come to me? what have *I* to do with your master's safety?"

"Madame," answered Ursula, taking a step nearer to Agatha, "madame, my master's death would relieve you of a menacing danger; therefore have I come."

"Then he is not dead?" said Agatha, her face growing colorless.

"No, he is not dead, nor likely to die. Dr. Maribel has brought him through the fever; but medical skill does not insure against means which may be used to silence a troublesome witness."

"Your words are disagreeably suggestive of an insulting and horrible suspicion. You dare much when you come into my private apartments; and pray do not force me to insist upon your leaving the room and the house at once."

"I have no fear of your anger, madame. It is causeless and unwise. Our interview need not be prolonged. I have ventured much for my master's sake—I have no personal interest to serve; so much the greater reason that you should listen to me. Madame, your precautions have been badly taken. You are Frances Wilbur, who was governess at the Featherstones over twenty years ago."

"This is a shallow conspiracy," cried Agatha, "an attempt to extort money. Say how much you will take to hold your tongue."

Despair and terror had driven her into a fatal imprudence—an admission which Ursule was not slow to understand. If she had had any doubts before, they had vanished now before Agatha's ill-concealed dismay.

"Madame," said Ursule, with a tinge of irritation in her tone, "my master has taken care that want shall give me no excuse for the greed of money-getting. I am independent of all those influences which so easily pervert a servant's honesty; but I am not insensible to your trouble; neither is it my intention to betray you. Your immediate danger lies in discovery, which will affect your relations with your present husband to your utter disgrace and ruin. Mr. Featherstone is a terrible witness against you. As long as he lives his saddened life must be a reproach to you, and a woman like you, madame—a woman who has her all at stake, is not to be trusted."

Agatha shivered as she walked to and fro, listening to Ursule's terrible words. The intensity of our wishes often makes us believe in the certainty of their fulfilment, and Agatha had relied greatly upon the chance of Featherstone's death as the surest way out of her difficulties; but although she could hope for deliverance through this channel, she was guiltless of the intention which Ursule's word implied. She saw herself judged by this woman,

and for the first time the possibility of crime as a sequence of her actions presented itself to her mind. Recoiling with horror, as from a terrible and newly revealed enemy, Agatha turned upon Ursule, with flashing eyes and nostrils distended by passion.

"Woman," she said, "you have lowered me in my own estimation by your judgment of me. One may become unconsciously reconciled to an idea. Tell your master to go away—but—" her face changed in its expression.

These quick transitions were natural to her, a new hope had sprung up in her heart—it was one of those straws at which despair mockingly points. "Can you prove that I, Mrs. Wilbraham, was the penniless governess who married Oscar Featherstone?"

Ursule drew from her pocket the letter which she had found, and held it towards her.

Agatha paused a moment before looking at it, and then her eye fell upon her own signature—"Frances Agatha Wilbur." Mechanically, she seated herself beside the table in the centre of the room, and, perhaps, overcome by the rush of fresh emotion, she remained silent, leaning her head upon her hand, the elbow resting on the table. Ursule was standing behind, her eyes fixed on the thick coils of blue-black hair. An observer might have noticed a quick bending forward, and an eager scrutiny in her bright black eyes. These experienced eyes had detected

a deception. The color of Agatha's hair was not natural. Madame had not yet made her toilet. The skilful hands of Babet had not been called into service, and the *maquero* had not been applied to the hair about the neck and temples, the blond color of which was plainly perceptible. How Ursule pitied her—this woman with her dyed hair and guilty heart.

Agatha had taken a pen from the stand and was tracing her name upon a sheet of paper. She seemed to have forgotten Ursule's presence. Again and again she wrote her name, always comparing it with the handwriting of the letter, and always finding the same fatal resemblance between the two signatures. At last, as if frustrated by repeated failure, she rose to her feet, tearing the paper into shreds and scattering them on the floor.

"Madame," said Ursule, "I nursed my master many long years ago through a terrible illness. Time had not then dulled the poignancy of his grief, and in his delirium he spoke often of a woman who had hair like a Madonna."

Agatha gave a short, nervous laugh. "She was blonde, then, this woman whom he loved. The old masters glorified their madonnas with blond hair."

"Yes, with such hair as yours once was."

Agatha heard this assertion with positive terror. Ursule spoke with the assurance of one dealing with solid facts, and these are ugly opponents. The victory must

always be on the side of facts, provided they are hurled by a steady hand.

"Madame," exclaimed Ursule, seeing that she had no further opposition to expect from Agatha, "God be my witness that I intend you no harm. My object in coming to you was to secure your promise never in any way to interfere with Mr. Featherstone's safety or happiness. When I say happiness, I anticipate a future with which you may materially interfere. You understand, madame? You must protect Miss Pittman from any possible harm which may menace her."

"I understand you," said Agatha, in a dull, despairing tone. "I know to what I pledge myself when I give you the required promise. Go, I entreat you. Your master is in no danger, at least such danger as you apprehend; but I cannot shield him from the consequences of his foolish and fatal love. I was unworthy of him then; I am far more guilty now."

"Madame," Ursule's voice betrayed the sympathy which she felt for Agatha, "no one need know that a poor servant has discovered your secret."

Judging from that moral standard which she had gained by intercourse with a world which had given her no very exalted opinion of its disinterestedness, Agatha was tempted to have recourse to what, in most cases, proves a conciliatory negotiator; but her ready tact warned her that any offer of money would be an affront to one whose

forbearance towards herself argued a nobleness of character entirely opposed to the pusillanimity which would accept a bribe to elench a promise.

Agatha sat where Ursula had left her; the positive misery of her position bringing that apathy which settles upon a soul in view of the inevitable. Her secret was in the keeping of a woman, and that woman a servant. Was it worth while to continue the struggle? Her eyes turned quickly towards the dressing case; it was so easy—a few drops more, and then! "Ah, my God! how my heart trembles and grows weak!"

She rose from her seat, and walked to the open window. She heard Miss Eleanor speaking to the gardener. They were just under the window. "See that these flowers are sent at once, Roderick, with my compliments, to Miss Pitkin."

Suddenly her trouble seemed to change its aspect. "My God!" she murmured, the hot tears streaming down her cheek. "Would that she were indeed Kitty Pitkin!" The thought of the threatened shame and exposure became intolerable. How she clung to Kitty's love—the only human love upon which she could have relied in all its pure integrity. Impelled now by the power of this love, which acted upon her impulsive temperament as a stimulus to a higher degree of generosity and self-sacrifice than that of which she was ordinarily capable, she determined to place Kitty under the protection of her father. Her

mind had reached that climax of suffering which had impaired its powers of reasoning, and in coming to this decision she had really overlooked the consequences to herself; but Agatha rarely counted cost, and perhaps the hardness towards herself, and her indifference to her own fate, grew out of an undefined sort of repentance which sought absolution in self-inflicted punishment. On the other hand, her flight from Worleigh was escape from a thralldom which was horribly irksome to her. A beggar is not apt to be ashamed of his rags; they are tokens to him of a freedom which, however revolting from our standpoint, has certain phases of enjoyment which he would not willingly yield up. So a woman who has once broken free from the restraints of social obligation and tasted of the dangerous freedom of irresponsibility, is hardly to be trusted when she forsakes this freedom for the (to her) galling servitude of respectability. We are apt to think in the abstract of such women, if we think about them at all; but there are few whose experience will not enable them to particularize, and who have not been called upon to exercise a plenteous charity in their judgment of them.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"THIS SPEECH OF YOURS HATH MOVED ME."

SO you have nothing to tell me, Ursule?"

"Absolutely nothing, Doctor."

John Maribel buttoned his riding gloves, while he gave Ursule a somewhat doubting and reproachful look.

"I must find your master all right to-morrow morning," he rejoined.

"Ah! but I am glad to get him away from this dull house. Pardon, Doctor, but to a man like Mr. Featherstone a disappointment is serious."

"You think, then," answered John Maribel, "that I have been indulging his fancy. Well, there may be little harm in allowing a man to think that the morrow has some good in store for him, especially if the probability is strong in his favor."

"But if the morrow comes without the good, what then?"

"Why, he will have had a good night's rest, and all the better bear his disappointment. I think I may safely

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predict a pleasant day at Oaklands for your master. Good-night, Ursula."

John rode away at a brisk pace. He had a visit to make to a sick child before going to Oaklands, where he was to pass the night. He was proceeding slowly along the road which passed by Blackwell's orchard, when he espied Jope balancing himself on the topmost rail of the fence, and wearing an aspect of dejection and forlornness which suggested the possibility of some new trouble at Blackwell's.

At sight of the Doctor he sprang to the ground, exclaiming, "Oh, Doctor, if I could have had my wish just now, it would have been to see you a-coming along this road. Aunt Susan is worse, sir. I was thinking about going after you to-morrow morning, but it's all the better that you've come to-night." He walked slowly beside the horse as he talked.

"Is Perry at home, Jope?"

"No, sir, I haven't seen Perry since that awful and ever-to-be-remembered day."

John's face looked grave as he said:

"I waited to see him after the funeral, Jope, but not finding him, I concluded that he had come here."

"Well, sir," answered Jope, with a slight hesitancy of manner—boys are so naturally reserved on those subjects which reveal the undercurrent of their feeling, the softness of which they are half-ashamed—"I went to the graveyard this morning. It seemed so lonesome like for her to

be left there, and nobody to go nigh her. The grave was sodded as nice as could be, and I saw tracks all about it. These tracks were made by Perry's boots, Doctor, I am sure they was."

"Perry is shy and proud," said John Maribel, speaking as if to himself; "and he takes his grief all the harder because he will not let a friend share it with him."

"Doctor," remarked Jope, turning his head a little to one side and thrusting his hands in his pockets, "I always have found that unard sort of people is the deepest. Say-nothings is good-doers."

John Maribel was inwardly amused at the manner in which Jope delivered himself of his homely aphorism; but he admitted its truth with a countenance of perfect gravity.

"Jope, you surely have heard something of Perry?"

"Only what old Brutus told me, sir. He went over to Worleigh last night, and was late coming home. He told me this morning that he saw a man cross the creek and take the road that goes up to Collin's store. I'm pretty sure that it must have been Perry, Doctor."

John Maribel rode on in silence. Jope's words were ominous. He knew that Perry held tenaciously to his own way of judging men, and that the treachery of which he had been the victim was likely to create an unhappy influence upon his character.

They had reached the house, and Jope fastened the

Doctor's horse while he went in to see the sorrowing old man. The kitchen was deserted, and Jerusha, hearing his footsteps, came out of the opposite room and asked him to go in.

Mrs. Blackwell lay on a bed of painted pine, very high from the floor, and piled with mattresses and a feather bed, while several small, soft pillows supported her head. A checked homespun counterpane, bordered with deep fringe, covered her form, and the poor old hands were clasped in helpless grief outside. John was shocked to see the ravages which sorrow had traced on her face, and he spoke to her in tones soft with tender and pitying sympathy.

"It's no manner of use, Doctor," she murmured, "it's no manner of use to physic me; I don't know as I care to stay now she's gone, my only one, the baby of my old age!"

A groan proceeded from the bent form of Blackwell, who sat in the darkened corner. John had not been aware of his presence, and turned to speak to him; but at sight of the poor stricken old man he held his peace.

Blackwell wore no coat, and his suspenders hung loose from his pants—unwashed, unshaven, in dark, comfortless sorrow he sat, speaking no word, making no sound, save now and then the deep guttural groan that seemed rending his very soul.

"It's dreadful, Doctor" whispered Jerusha, "that

dreadful that I can't bear to look at him. He haint said a word or eat a mouthful since yesterday; and I don't believe he lay down last night. Won't you speak to him, sir? maybe you could say something as 'll stir his heart and break up his grief like."

"I will do my best, Jerusha," and going over to where Blackwell sat, he laid his hand upon his arm.

"My good friend," he said, "your wife is ill. Rouse up; it is not like you to neglect her."

"Eh, Doctor! Susan's been poorly for years," he answered, without lifting his head.

"All the more does she need your care now. Come, my friend, I have a word to say to you. Not here; we will go out."

With gentle force he assisted the old man to rise, and they went out into the barn-yard amid familiar sights and sounds, and seated themselves upon an overturned trough.

Instinctively, Blackwell straightened himself and looked about him. The force of habit was breaking through the lethargy that seemed to have deadened him to every consciousness save that of his affliction.

The tramping of hoofs and the rustling of fodder that was being torn away from the rick fell upon his ear, and with kindling ire he exclaimed:

"The brown ox is at the fodder! Where's the lazy rascal that he can't put up the bars?"

Never had words fallen more pleasantly upon Jope's

ear. This, at least was natural. His uncle's dreadful silence had awed him into positive terror, and even at his own expense he was glad to have it broken up."

"He jumped the bars, Uncle Mark; but he hasn't had time to do much damage. I'll have him out in a minute." And away he went chasing the mischievous beast into the pasture. This little scene was just what John Maribel would have arranged had he had anything to do with it. As it was, he felt very much obliged to the brown ox who had opened a way to further conversation about the yield of fodder, the sweet potato crop, the mare that had just foaled, and the pigs that had been brought home from the creek. From wood and pasture the lowing herd came homeward. The milking hour was at hand. Blossom and Daisy, Cherry and Pretty-maid, one by one they stood outside the fence, turning their great soft eyes towards their eager calves. Abby had named the cows. Daisy and Blossom were perhaps associated in her mind with some ramble through the spring woods when the dogwood was in bloom, and Cherry and Pretty-maid were souvenirs of some maiden dream, the quaint fancy of a country-girl led to the simple weaving of untutored thoughts. Jerusha came out with the milk-pail, glancing uneasily at Blackwell. She guessed what was passing in his mind. "Turn in Blossom," she said to the boy who watched the calves. As the beautiful, white creature stepped over the bars, a great sob arose

above the clamor of the barn-yard. Blackwell bowed his head on his shaking hands, and wept aloud. It was like the breaking up of a storm-cloud—the outletting of pent-up waters. Rising, he tottered towards the house and entered the room where his wife lay. Sinking on his knees beside the bed, his softened heart sent forth its appeal for mercy and pardon.

John Maribel heard the old woman's piteous weeping mingling with her husband's broken supplications. He knew that all was well with Mark Blackwell; and with a kind word to Jope and a comforting assurance to Jerusha, he mounted his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"I KNOW HIS GAIT, 'TIS HE."

WHEN Jerusha had placed the supper on the table, she went to the old man and coaxed him to come and partake of some refreshment.

"The coffee is strong, Uncle Mark, and I fried a bit of bacon for you. Aunt Susan might take heart to drink her tea if only you would eat and take comfort."

"Yes, husband," insisted Mrs. Blackwell, "try to take comfort. It's not right to turn from God's gifts."

To humor her desire, Blackwell went to his supper. Jerusha had opened wide the windows, and the slanting sun-rays lay across the matted floor. Blackwell seated himself in his accustomed place, but he forgot to thank God for the smoking corn-cake and crisp bucon. Thankfulness is a vivid consciousness of obligation which allies itself to gratitude, and is spontaneous in acknowledgments; while grief, like joy, is an absorbing sentiment and precludes the recognition of that immediate need which Mercy divines and for which a loving Father finds a remedy. Blackwell at that moment was alive to but one emotion, the bitter consciousness of Abby's absence. Everywhere her memory lingered—everywhere association linked it to the minutest details of every-day life. His old heart was busy with the past. He felt his little one clinging about his neck and pressing her soft, round cheek to his; he saw her running to meet him as he came from the fields, and then bringing him the gourd of fresh spring-water, holding her little hand beneath it, to catch the overflowing drops; he saw her expanding into maidenhood under his doting eyes, fresh and blushing as the roses which she loved to gather. And oh, God! he saw her with that beauty marred—all her comeliness destroyed in the cruel horror of her death. A sense of bitter desolation overwhelmed him as he murmured:

"Turn Thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted."

"Uncle Mark," exclaimed Jerusha, "I've heard you trying to comfort other people, and why can't you take the words that you said to them to yourself. God's promises haven't changed their meaning as I know, and what He says He's likely to perform. Uncle Mark, you're forgetting that you are not the only one who loved *her*—you are forgetting that *he's* wandering round, God knows where; and you taking no account of what may befall him."

"God forgive me, Jerusha. God forgive my selfish grief."

The habit of fastening upon Jope a responsibility, which was not the least of those harassings that he was called upon to bear uncomplainingly, induced the old man to turn sharply upon him, saying: "Eh, Jope, where is Perry gone to?"

"I am sure I wish I could tell you, Uncle Mark."

"You take the mare," continued Blackwell, "and go to Oaklands—he's working there—and you say that I want him to come home."

The young man, trained to prompt obedience, pushed aside his plate, and rose to leave the room, a look from Jerusha warning him to keep silent. As he saddled the mare, he reflected that Perry was not a man to go back on himself when he had made up his mind to a certain course

of action, and that in all likelihood, having failed in his purpose the night before, he would return to Worleigh. Acting upon this conviction, he rode down to the creek, and leading the horse a short distance from the road, fastened the bridle to the limb of a willow. He then crossed the creek and stationed himself where he had a view of the road and the lower portion of the grounds of Worleigh. After waiting what seemed to him an interminable time, he saw a tall, drooping figure approaching, and as it passed within a few feet of him he recognized Perry Deane. With an unutterable dread in his heart he cautiously followed him, walking as much as possible in the shadow of the shrubbery, and keeping at a safe distance.

As usual during the summer months, the library windows were open, and the interior of the apartment perfectly visible from without. It was De Rousy's habit, as we have seen, to sit here after the rest of the family had retired; and, as if cognizant of this fact, Perry approached the window, not with the stealthy step of the murderer, but boldly, like a man who had no fear of being recognized.

As the light gleaming from the window fell on his face, Jope saw the clear, hard eyes, the firm-set jaw, the long-neglected beard and unkempt hair, and in his face and attitude a firm resolve. Within, the handsome, cynical De Rousy sat with his swarthy cheek resting on his white,

delicate hand. The whole mien of the man expressed insolence and self-confidence.

The window being low, Perry stepped easily from the ground, and without hesitation walked straight to the table at which De Rousy sat, not, however, before he had perceived the presence of the intruder, and risen to his feet.

"What does this intrusion mean, fellow?" he exclaimed, in a menacing tone.

"It means," answered Perry, deliberately, "that you will listen to what I have to say."

"Ha! you have stolen into Mr. Willbraut's house after the fashion of the melodramatic villain, to wreak your vengeance on me, ha, ha! Take my advice, my good fellow, and go home. I suppose you consider yourself injured, though, upon my word, I don't know for what; and if you have come here with the idea of——"

"Stop!" cried Perry; "take care of what you say. I know as little about a fine-dressed villain as you do about an honest man; but I know right from wrong, and I know, by G—! what a man deserves when he takes away a girl a good name, and drives her to her own destruction. I came here last night to deal with you according to my ideas of justice."

De Rousy was unarmed, and no match for the stalwart carpenter. His eye glanced rapidly over the room in search of some weapon with which to defend himself.

"I don't mean to harm you," said Perry, contemptuously. "If I did, you are completely at my mercy. My arm would stand me in good stead against two such men as you are. I told you that I had a few words to say to you, Mr. De Rousy, and I intend to say them. I came here last night, and there in that chair sat Kitty Pitkin. I saw something in her face which melted my heart into pity, and turned me from my purpose. Her love protects you as long as you do fairly by her; but I swear to G— it will go hard with you, if ever again you play false to her. Do you heed me, Mr. de Rousy? I'll have it out of you, and pay the double debt I will owe you."

"Your threats are easier made than executed, my good fellow," answered De Rousy, resuming his assurance; "but, upon my word, I have no object in deceiving you or any one else in this matter; and I would pledge my soul for the truth of my words, when I say that had Abby not met with a horrible death there was no reason why she should not have been your wife. She was innocent."

"Mr. de Rousy," said Perry, "I wish I could believe you; but to my way of thinking you've just done the greatest injury which a man can do to a woman—you have taken away her good name, and all that you can say will never give it back to her. You know she lost her life in trying to get to you."

"Let me speak—let me speak," cried Jope, springing through the window; "thank God, I'm here! The night

Before the storm I was sitting in the kitchen, when Abby came in quite unexpected and sudden-like. Uncle Mark and Aunt Susan was gone to prayer-meeting. Abby came in and spoke to me, and I answered her as I shouldn't have done if I had known what was in her heart. She burst out crying and sobbing, saying as how she had lost her good name, all along of listening to him as sits there. She said she knew that she had done wrong, and she asked me, in a piteous way that would have moved your heart, Perry, to help her. I promised her to do the best I could; and I went to Oaklands to ask you to forgive her. I started in the rain, Perry, to fetch you to her, and as I was riding back with disappointment in my heart—as I was there by the creek, I saw her. Oh, Lord! it was a sight to break a man's heart! As to you, sir," addressing himself to De Rouxy, "if she was innocent—and I believe she was only light and foolish-like—if she was innocent, there's no thanks due to you for it; and I'd as soon as not cut your lying throat, that I would, for all the trouble you've brought on them as never harmed you. She can't speak for herself, poor, dead Abby; she can't say as how in her heart she was true to Perry; she can't tell how she threw your red ring into the farthest corner of the kitchen, which Jersha she swept it out and buried it. No, she can't tell how her poor heart ached for shame and sorrow when Dr. Maribel saw her a-talking to you. Oh! she's dumb enough now; but I'll speak for

her and I'll clear her name; and by the Lord, sir, I'd like to strip off your fine feathers and show you up for what you are!"

Jope's earnestness left no doubt about the truth of his words or his courage, which would have led him then and there to match his strength with De Rousy's, had not Perry whispered a word in his ear.

"Yes," he answered aloud, "it's all along of her that I give in, and more's the pity!"

He thrust his hands into his pockets, as if the temptation to use them was still strong upon him, and continued: "I'll say this for Miss Kitty, that I'll never believe as how she takes to the likes of you, unless I hear it from her own lips and see it with my eyes."

"Which you are scarcely likely to do, sir," replied De Rousy with overbearing insolence of manner. He knew that he was safe from physical violence—that these men, poor and humble as they were, had spared him from a sense of delicate consideration for the young creature whose happiness was involved in his fate. Secure in this knowledge, he continued: "Go back to your pigs and calves, boy, and forget that you ever knew such a person as Kitty Pitkin."

"When I do," answered Jope, "it will be a bad business for you."

"Mr. de Rousy," said Perry, with a dignity and firmness which commanded the respect of the man whom he

addressed, and enlisted his attention, "you have taken advantage of my forbearance to be insulting in your words and manner. If I crushed every bone in your body there isn't a man in the county who won't condemn me; and perhaps there's many a one as will say what I don't deserve, because they will never know *why* I have spared you. Now I intend that you shall clear Abby's name of the foul stain which rests upon it. It is not sufficient that you have declared her innocent to me. You shall do it before witnesses—gentlemen of standing, whom I will select; and I require this of you as much for Miss Pitkin's sake as for the memory of her who is beyond the reach of human aid. This is all I have to say. I give you until to-morrow night to fulfil those conditions—remember, until to-morrow night; and by G—, sir! you are let off easily; for I could take your life this moment with less remorse than I would kill a vicious dog."

De Rousy quailed before the flaming eyes of the stalwart carpenter. He gave the promise in good faith, feeling, however, an unpleasant apprehension as to the effect which his confession would make upon gentlemen who held rigid ideas in matters of this kind, and might think it their duty to expose his conduct to Kitty's friends.

"I don't care to come here again," said Perry. "Mr. Wilbraham's house is no place for me to come to settle this difficulty; and an ugly one it will be for you, Mr.

de Rousy, if you shirk your promise. Name another place of meeting, and I'll be there."

"I shall go over to Oaklands to-morrow," replied De Rousy, "and, in all probability, it will suit you to have the damned business over before the men whom I expect to meet."

"Well, yes; if you say that you'll come out square before Col. Covington and Dr. Maribel, I'll be satisfied."

De Rousy marked his sense of relief, when the two men had rid him of their presence, by stretching out his legs to their full length, and after a prolonged yawn placing a dauntily rolled cigarette between his lips. He dismissed as speedily as possible from his mind the remembrance of the humiliation which he had suffered at the hands of his recent visitors; and with equal facility did he dissipate, in the wreaths of smoke which went curling upward from his well-shaped lips, all moral responsibility in their troubles.

It would require a deep and subtle knowledge of the shadowy phases of that secret inner life which in tortuous darkness works out the schemes of selfish villainy, to attempt to understand the intercommunication between this man's interest and his passion for Kitty. True, however, was it that his sensuous love could easily become subservient to his interest, and placed in the balance it would weigh as nothing against the deep-seated ruling motive of his selfish heart. Being fully alive to the nature

of Kitty's feeling towards himself, he foresaw the consequences which Perry had intended in all probability to bring about. The impudent carpenter, who pretended to deny to a gentleman the right of amusing himself! "Ah, bah!" he exclaimed aloud, "*la jeu vaut la chandelle*, or long ago I would have turned my back upon Worleigh, its mistress, and these independent rustics who dictate terms to a man, with an assurance which is positively absurd. Ha! ha! Think of my being obliged to confess that—well, upon my word, it isn't pleasant to think about."

He hummed an air from "*Le Barbier*" as he passed Agatha's door on his way to his own room.

CHAPTER I.

"BITTER SHAME HATH SPOIL'D THE SWEET WORLD'S
TASTE."

FOR the first time since his illness, Oscar Featherstone sat at his organ; his fingers wandering softly, feebly over the keys; but gathering force from inspiration, the notes gradually grow in strength, until the old house was filled with the swelling melody. His fancy seemed revelling in strains which breathed the

joy of a grateful heart—some alluring anticipation quickened his genius into exquisite improvisation, and the remembrance of the evil past receded before the effulgence of that happy light which dawned upon his soul. The music softened into a low, plaintive air; it commingled with the dream which wrapt his senses into unconsciousness of all outward impressions, else he would have heard an opening door—he would have known that his fate, in the person of Agatha, stood close behind him. Every tone drawn from the instrument by those delicate hands pierced her guilty breast with poignant anguish. They told her of a pure soul lifting itself upward—catching glimpses of the glory beyond, where, with assured foreknowledge, he saw the sublime consolation of an enfranchised life. She stood looking at the man whom she had so basely deceived. As she listened to the enraptured strains, an impulsive sympathy moved her to a vague, undefined longing, which resolved itself into a yearning for forgiveness. Emotional remorse is pervading while it lasts; and Agatha noted with quickened sensibility the premature signs of age in Oscar Featherstone. She had little actual experience of this kind of self-reproach, which became a positive pain as she looked at his bent form. But it was not in her uncertain and capricious nature to submit without impatience to sensations likely to disturb her habitual custom of adopting a mode of reasoning calculated to justify the motives which impelled her actions, and she suddenly

changed her position, placing herself directly before Mr. Featherstone. With quick comprehension of a long-dreaded possibility, he knew her in spite of her disguise, and, rising, stood looking fixedly upon her. There was more of curiosity than of surprise in the survey, and an absence of emotion, which was wounding to Agatha's vanity, and brought with it that sense of loss which is galling to a woman who has exercised the power of her fascination, and is suddenly forced to recognize her dethronement.

"You have not forgotten me in all these years?" she said; "you have not forgiven?"

"To forget, one must never have loved," he answered. "Forgiveness is an attribute of mercy, and God does not withhold its exercise in the adjustment of human offences, but it does not readily spring into action under the consciousness of cruelty and undeserved affliction."

He spoke in an incisive tone, which for him was the strongest form of reproach, and which stung Agatha with a certain sense of injustice towards that heroic resolve of which she was conscious in coming to him.

"Oscar," she said, "I would not impose upon you the idea that repentance has driven me to you to ask your forgiveness. No, I have come to you like a coward who is too weak to bear the shame of exposure and disgrace; I have come when my plans are menacing with failure and threaten to overwhelm another life in my ruin.

Oscar, I will not deny that self confidence and a foolish reliance upon good fortune has warped the judgment which experience and knowledge of the world ought to have given me. In my passionate life I have garnered no stock of patience, none of that consolation which religious faith furnishes, and which, I suppose, is the best insurance against despair. I have none of the props with which good women sustain themselves—none of the virtues which make domestic martyrs. I have only the consciousness of my love and of my misery—the dread of a future without hope—the certainty of loss. It is hard, I know, for you to invest faith in my purity of intention, or in that purpose of atonement which mingles with the deeper current of my feelings; nor can I expect you to understand the suffering of a soul which relinquishes its chance of happiness in the realization of a life-long anticipation, when every action of that life has strongly contradicted the possibility of the existence of that virtue which is essential to the carrying out of a good purpose. I do not wish to deceive you into the notion that my coming to you is the result of a premeditated desire to commit an act of justice towards yourself; although my action has assumed the form of self-sacrifice and renunciation, and might easily lead you to idealize, as is your wont, a process which destroys impartial judgment; and it is no part of my intention to lead you into error with regard to my course of action in the future. I will even confess to you

that the conception of whatever is worthy in my resolve came after the knowledge of threatened personal risk, but you may rely upon my good faith, and upon the strength of that love which inspires me now to place a barrier between Catherine and myself, which will effectually separate her from the chance of shame and mortification which knowledge of our relationship would bring to her. She knows me as Mrs. Wilbruham, and you may protect her from the wretched consequences of my ill-doing. The only mercy which I ask of you, Oscar, is to spare me to her. The thought of her scorn and contempt is like the scourge of the avenging furies lashing me into frenzy.

"She had spoken with passionate vehemence, her words overcoming, in Featherstone's mind, the natural incredulity which resisted belief in this woman's singleness of purpose, and she had marked the changes in his countenance and saw now with bitter jealousy the ineffable expression of joy and content which came with the knowledge of his daughter's existence. His joy was intensified by the assurance that her life had been spent apart from Agatha, that its pure current had been untroubled by the influence of a corrupt association, and his satisfaction found vent, as was natural to his occasional turn of mind, in an ejaculation of intense thankfulness to God, which irritated Agatha into one of those outbursts of passion under which Featherstone had so often mutely suffered.

"Keep back your joy," she cried, "until I am gone.

Do not mock me with a display of your exalted devotion which I could never endure!"

She had taken the old tone with him. She had never been able to comprehend his immeasurable superiority, nor to respect those noble qualities whose manifestation were perhaps unpleasant reminders of her own moral want. Oscar Featherstone yielded an involuntary obedience to high moral law, and in his heart this woman stood condemned; but there exists a beautiful harmony between justice and mercy. The one tempers the other, and out of the two is created the attribute, which, more than any other, brings the soul of man into tender relationship with Christ's humanity—forgiveness. With chivalric generosity he accorded her the ready sympathy of his generous heart, for in proportion to his own great joy was the natural grief which she suffered in presence of that inevitable separation from the child whom she loved. The precious balsam of an approving conscience lends itself to a gracious action, and Mr. Featherstone made a step towards Agatha, his great, beautiful eyes softened with an emotion which caused hers to fall beneath them, her proud heart swelling at the thought of his pity; but she listened longingly for his words. There was in his manner a reserve strongly repellant to the tone of familiarity which she had assumed, and which was wounding to her keen sensibility of implied reproof.

"Madam," he said, "believe, I pray you, that I ac-

cost in its truest, highest sense the renunciation which you have made. I know what it has cost you, and while I cannot but admit that you are doing what is far best for the dear being concerned, I most deeply deplore your unfortunate lot. If forgiveness for the wrongs which I have suffered at your hands can in any way alleviate your sorrow, believe me, it is freely accorded."

She gave Lin a swift, upward glance, in which there was awakened sense of appreciation. Perhaps just at that moment the overwhelming weight of desolation created a need for reliance on human sympathy; and her perfect confidence in Oscar Featherstone's sincerity gave her courage to ask a favor.

"I am not insensible," she answered, "to your generosity, nor will I deny that your forgiveness is indifferent to me. I have involved the innocent in the meshes of my own ill doing, and I owe it to them to make what slight reparation I may. There is one over whose life I have exercised a fatal influence—a woman, old and afflicted, who, though she may have deviated from the path of strict honesty in her dealing with Dr. Mariel, yet merits his pardon; for in stooping to deception she yielded to a sense of higher duty, exercising a heroic self-sacrifice in carrying out a scheme which gave to Catherine a guide and companion whose refinement and cultivation counterbalanced the disadvantages which unhappily surrounded her. You will hear from Dr. Mariel

bel the strange story of her abandonment. I have neither courage nor inclination to go through its recital; but I beseech you, for the sake of what she has done for the child, to protect Mrs. Parrott from the opprobrium which justly attaches itself to deceit. The fault is altogether mine, for I made use of that influence which all my life I have exercised over those who gave me their love, to force her to compliance."

"You may rest assured," replied Featherstone, "that she will suffer from no want of sympathy or lack of protection in her trying position. I can safely answer for Maribel's kindness; for a truly noble nature is lenient in judgment, and long years of association have taught him the worth of his companion. She shall be spared as far as it may be in my power. Pray give yourself no further uneasiness on this score."

"Then our interview need not be lengthened. It is but fair that I should leave no doubt upon your mind for the future." A great sob rose in her throat, choking her utterance, but with prompt self-command she recovered her composure and continued. "I promise you never to trouble you more. Good-by."

With a quick, sudden movement, she caught his hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Good-by; only now do I realize all that I have lost."

Before he could detain her—before he had time to

frame a word, she was gone. He was still standing where she left him, when he heard the clang of the old iron gate, shutting her out forever from the home which might have sheltered her.

CHAPTER LI.

"FOR BY HIS FACE STRAIGHT SHALL YOU KNOW HIS HEART."

WHEN we have witnessed the throes of passion and the painful unrest of an anguished mind, we turn with a sensation of positive pleasure and relief to the contemplation of the calm delights of tranquil domestic life. Gracious reader, accompany me to the old-fashioned parlor at Oakland, and we will there find repose and refreshment in the society of Colonel and Mrs. Covington, whose presence harmonizes so perfectly with their rococo surroundings. Heavy polished mahogany chairs and tables; bookcases with glass doors lined with green silk, and filled with rows of respectable volumes, bearing names dear to the heart of every English scholar; a side-board with huge silver pitchers, cut-glass tumblers and decanters; on the walls family portraits smiling complacently down at you, holding red volumes

with a finger thrust between the pages, as if they had been surprised at their reading and were still waiting to continue where they left off. One old lady, however, may be mentioned as an exception to this posthumous fondness for reading, and as a specimen likewise of an old lady who would be quite as unfashionable to-day as the books in the bookcase. She wore a white muslin cap, tied under a double chin, a spotless kerchief crossing her full bosom, and her small, delicate hands were folded on her black silk gown. We look up with instinctive respect, to find the clear, steady eyes meeting ours; and to judge, from the firm mouth with the somewhat square chin, that the old lady held opinions which in all likelihood had been rendered effective by being put into pure, forcible English, and enunciated without fear of contradiction from her family. Indeed, "Sister Polly," as Col. Covington called her—her name was Mary—had been a matron, lovingly submissive to her lord, yet wielding with wise firmness the sceptre of her little kingdom. Pure in thought, simple in her habits, old-fashioned in her ideas about modesty and propriety—oh, dear! what would she think of young ladyhood of to-day?—earnestly pious, and shedding a wholesome influence, not only over her own immediate family, but also upon that larger family, those dependent beings of another race, whom she considered peculiarly committed to her care, and whose comfort and welfare were very near her heart. Such was

"Sister Polly," a type of a race which has well-nigh passed away. We have lingered a moment, looking at this "southern matron," and thinking, perhaps somewhat sadly, of the old life of which so little is left to us—and there are Colonel and Mrs. Covington shamefully neglected, while I fear

"I am much too venturesome
In tempting of your patience."

Here in their country home, away from the eager, restless life in "troublesome cities pent," the uneventful days followed each other, bringing in rapid succession the changing seasons with their duties and employments.

Col. Covington superintended his fields and his orchards with the true taste of the country gentleman who had invested not only his money, but also his destiny in this pastoral life. He needed no turbulent excitement to chase away haunting remembrance; for although his days were not without care—Arcadia is a long way from the Southern States—and he was often involved in vexatious litigation, yet this very involvement was attributable to a noble reliance upon human probity and—a simple faith in his lawyer's advice.

Mrs. Covington was apt to say wives do make themselves so disagreeable when they attempt to thank for their lords—that her advice listened to in due time and season would have been eminently effective in preventing

the disastrous consequences of her husband's too great leniency in business transactions. "The best of all wisdom," the old lady would persist in saying, "is to avoid the contrivances of the law;" but Col. Covington gave just that attention to her sound advice which men are apt to lend to feminine counsel, and in this instance, as in numberless others—the unpleasant occurrence in the garden of Eden notwithstanding, we will assert that such advice is both prudent and practical.

The old gentleman was standing near the door and held the buggy whip in his hand, for he was about to set out for Worleigh to bring Kitty home. His costume was what might have been seen anywhere in the days of our fathers and grandfathers: trousers cut with the "full fall," over which hung the watch fob-chain and seals, a black satin vest, and a plain broadcloth coat, with a black silk cravat, and, when occasion required its use, a red foulard handkerchief was inevitably to be found in the coat-pocket.

They had been talking of the disasters of the storm, and speculating upon the manner of Abby's death.

"It is a pity, wife, that a man so agreeable in person and manner as is Do Rousy should be wanting in the essential qualities of a truly honorable man."

"Wanting in the *essential* qualities, Col. Covington? I should think so!" exclaimed the old lady, looking at her husband over her spectacles. "I would like to give

Mr. de Rouay a piece of my mind. As for Abby, she was always a poor, foolish, vain thing, but pretty as a new-blown rose; and no one is to blame about her going astray half so much as Mark and Susan Blackwell. If Mark had quoted Solomon less and practised his wisdom more, he wouldn't now in his old age be ashamed to hold up his head among his neighbors. De Rouay is a sugar-coated villain. I don't hesitate to use plain words."

"You generally get at the core of things," the Colonel answered, smiling slightly, "and I perfectly agree with you, my dear, in thinking that this sugar-coating makes him a most unsafe companion for a very young girl. However, I scarcely think that we will be much longer troubled with his presence in our neighborhood; and if he is wise, he will hurry his departure. Hugh will be here in a few days, to say nothing of another man who owes him a grudge."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Covington, rising and putting her knitting in the work-basket, "I have little patience with such men as Hugh Wilbraham. It is difficult to conceive of Charles Wilbraham's son making a fool of himself. In my opinion it's all come from his being sent to a German university, where his head was crammed with philosophy and metaphysics, and Heaven knows what, as if Yale wasn't good enough, when you and his father and my own brother John were educated there, as your diploma will show. Why couldn't he have married Emma

Moreland or Clara Sayre, or half a dozen others, instead of going to Europe and marrying a woman ever so much older than himself, and as unfitted to live *here* as a woman well can be. Think of a French maid at Worleigh, and a *gentleman* with *de* stuck to his nose! That means, I suppose, indemnity for villainy."

The old lady ceased, with exasperation added to her already excited temper, as she perceived that when she had turned, while still speaking, to take a key from the mantel-shelf, the Colonel had made his escape.

That evening, John Maribel, Mr. Smiley, Mr. McStebbins, and Kitty, sat around the tea-table at Oaklands when Mrs. Covington, having recovered her equanimity, dispensed the fragrant tea in delicate china cups, while the Colonel carved the broiled chickens. Conversation turned upon politics, which the old gentleman discussed with a warmth that left little doubt as to his strong and deep-rooted conservatism, while Kitty sat beside John Maribel, pale and silent and scarcely touching the food on her plate.

John watched her with tender solicitude, and tried to bring back to his manner all its old familiarity and cheerfulness. In this, however, he failed. There was so much that was *defensive* between them! How could he speak unreservedly when his heart was full of thought for the morrow? All unconscious of what it was bringing for her, Kitty sat listening to the conversation. Not once

during that evening did her clear laugh ripple over to the old Colonel's ears as he sat in his arm-chair; and she refused to sing, pleading headache as an excuse.

"You are not well, Kitty," said John, holding out his hand to her as she was going upstairs. Her heart ached to tell him of her trouble, but oh! how could she? and at the same time she felt quite guilty of concealment towards him.

"Good-night, dear John," she murmured, with downcast eyes. "If he would only kiss me," she thought, "as in the old times, and call me darling—it would be but for this once," and then she remembered that *other* kiss, and a crimson blush covered face and neck. With sudden, unconscious violence she withdrew her hand.

"Kitty!"

The pain in his voice went straight to her heart.

"Oh! dear John, forgive me. I am sure I did not mean to pain you."

"Darling," he whispered, the great love in his heart speaking through his tender eyes.

"Take me back home, John," she pleaded; "you don't know how weak and sinful I have been—pray, let me go home." She had clasped his hand in both of hers, the quivering lips were held up as in the days of yore—those rose-bud lips with their dainty curve.

She waited thus for his answer, while he remained dumb, looking at her. The struggle lasted but a moment.

Once more honor triumphed over passion, and pride whispered that he was to her but the representative of that natural protector which she would find in her father—that her affection was but the habitual intimacy of years rather than the deeper feeling which springs into life with awakened love. John pressed the little hand to his lips, and said: "Sleep well to-night, darling. We will talk of going back to-morrow."

CHAPTER LII.

"WE'LL HEAR THE WILL; READ IT, MARK ANTONY."

DAY breaks, "and yon gray lines that fret the clouds are messengers" of its advent. In blushing gladness the promise comes, and marshalled glory ushers the gorgeous majesty of day. Earth wakens to welcome him smiling in freshness, beautiful in color and sparkling with myriad jewels; while incense of mingled perfumes rises to consecrate her joy, and from her matchless choir bursts forth a grand *Te Deum* to celebrate the marvellous transformation. Oh! blind and deaf and dumb must be that being whose heart is dull to Nature's promptings; who does not see, in the "heavens

and the earth and all the host of them," cause for renewed thanksgiving; who is not ready to cry in rapturous ecstasies, *Adoramus te! Glorificamus te!*

Oscar Featherstone watched the sweetening of the September light as it fell on grass and leaf and flower. It was Kitty's birthday. All living things seemed to partake of the great joy which filled his heart. Birds twitted in the hedges, bees hummed in the woodbine; the full juiced apples hung mellowing in the sun; the pumpkins were turning gold among the corn, and the creamy fleece of the cotton was silvered with dew; while down in the valley the crystal waters stumbled over the dam and set the great mill wheel turning. He found himself on his way to Oaklands, he scarce knew how, and sat silent beside John Maribel, replying briefly to his words.

Colonel Covington was waiting to receive them. "I am heartily glad to see you, Mr. Pultney," he said, shaking him warmly by the hand. It had been agreed between the Colonel and John Maribel that the *incognito* would be preserved until the moment arrived when Mr. Featherstone should see fit to declare himself. Mrs. Covington met them in the hall, and at once took the visitor in charge, declaring that after so long a ride, and in his weak condition, he must need immediate refreshment.

Meanwhile Mr. Smiley conversed with Mr. McStebbins in the parlor, both of them anxiously awaiting the hour

fixed upon for the reading of the will. Kitty, in ignorance of the momentous event, gave little attention to the unusual bustle about the house. She was, however, startled into surprise, as she watched from her bed-room window the arrival of a stranger, and saw John Maribel helping him from the carriage.

"Ain't you going down stairs, Miss Kitty?" said the maid, coming in with a pitcher of water. "There's company, and mistress she's told Aunt Sahra to kill the big gobbler, and they are going to have whipped cream for dessert, and la! there's Mr. de Rousy a coming up the avenue; just look at him, Miss Kitty, a riding as if he'd never done a harmful thing, when, Lord knows, he'd better be thinking of her as is lying in the grave, all along of his wickedness, so folks say. What's the matter, Miss Kitty? Oh, I'll run and call mistress. You'll be a fainting right here, that white you've turned."

While she spoke Mrs. Covington entered the room. The old lady wore her best cap and black silk gown; and the calm dignity of her manner was replaced by a flurried excitement which was little calculated to restore Kitty's equanimity.

"Are you sick, my child?"

"Not in the least, dear Mrs. Covington," answered Kitty, her pale face belying her words.

"I'm afraid, then, my dear, that you are nervous. It will never do. Roseanna, go down stairs, and look in the

right-hand corner of the medicine-chest, and bring me the red lavender. A few drops will compose you, dear child. You must change your dress, and come with me down stairs."

"Will you not excuse me from going down until dinner?" asked Kitty.

"Most gladly, dear, did I consult my own inclination, which is always to indulge your wishes, but your presence is really necessary, and Mr. Smiley is now waiting for you."

Without further objection, Kitty proceeded to divest herself of her morning dress, obediently swallowed the lavender, and with Roseanna's assistance completed a toilet which Mrs. Covington pronounced perfect, as she took a rose from a vase and nestled it among the lace at her throat.

John Maribel was awaiting them at the foot of the stairs. "I was off this morning, Kitty, before you were up," he said, assuming a careless air; and drawing her hand within his arm, they proceeded to the parlor.

On entering, they were startled to see Mr. Smiley, with flushed countenance and indignant manner, speaking to De Rousy, who turned and bowed to Kitty. John felt her hand tremble as he led her to her seat.

"Mr. de Rousy," said Mr. Smiley, "do you not see that your presence has excited the young lady? Will

you force me to tell you that it is an unjustifiable intrusion?"

De Rousy leaned forward, and whispered in the lawyer's ear. The sting of an adder could not have startled Mr. Smiley more disagreeably than did De Rousy's words; while Colonel Covington, growing impatient of delay, took a turn on the piazza, and, as he re-entered the room, exclaimed, "Had we not better proceed to business, Smiley? De Rousy's presence, however unexpected, I am in duty bound to acknowledge with courtesy, feeling assured that it admits of explanation."

De Rousy came forward, his handsome lips curling with provocative insolence, and bowing slightly to Colonel Covington, he said: "Under ordinary circumstances I would owe you an apology for my intrusion; but the circumstances under which I entered this room are entirely exceptional. I pray Mr. Smiley to proceed at once with the reading of the will. As he said those words he coolly walked to the mantelpiece, and taking an attitude of nonchalant grace, prepared to listen.

Kitty seemed neither to hear nor to understand what was going on around her. She sat with downcast eyes, pale as the white rose at her throat. John Maribel stood behind her chair. Mr. McStebbins sat at the table looking nervous and uneasy; while Colonel and Mrs. Covington occupied arm-chairs, the old lady fluttering her cologne-scented handkerchief from time to time, while the Colonel,

with grave dignity disposed himself with head slightly bent forward, elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and his fingers built into a pyramid, to give his attention to the important document with which the reader is already acquainted.

The long formula was gone through with—the names of witnesses, the date, etc., etc.—and in the midst of the complete silence which followed, Mr. Smiley rose from his seat, and bowing, said: "Miss Featherstone, permit me to be the first to congratulate you."

"A moment, sir," exclaimed De Roussy, stepping to the table, and leaning his white hand on it. The lawyer knew how seriously the words this man was about to utter would bear against the welfare of the young creature who sat so still there, giving no sign of the violent emotion which rendered her mute, save in quivering lip and heaving bosom. "We have all heard," continued De Roussy, "the very clear and binding conditions of this will. Mr. Smiley, have the goodness to read over again the clause relating to the disposal of the estate in case of forfeiture."

Mr. Smiley read the clause.

"Now," asked De Roussy, "will you give your opinion as to its rendering?"

"The clause admits of no misapprehension," answered Mr. Smiley. "I am afraid that should Gaston de Ferrière present himself with proper documentary evidence—in fact, his identity once clearly proven—it would be my

painful duty to acknowledge him the heir of one of the finest properties in the State. In that case, no one would console more sincerely with Miss Featherstone than her obedient servant," bowing to Kitty.

"Miss Featherstone's interest may be easily and naturally reconciled with those of the heir-at-law, for I assert that as that heir I claim her promise to be my wife." He looked around, his eye resting triumphantly on John Maribel as he continued: "I am prepared at every point to make good my claim to the Featherstone estate, and to prove that Frances Featherstone, in the person of Agatha Wilbruhm, has broken the conditions of the will, and forfeited her child's rights; and that I am the Gaston de Ferrière who is the fortunate possessor of wealth which he is ready to lay at Miss Featherstone's feet."

Kitty had risen from her chair and taken a step towards De Rousy, who stood revealed to her in all the blackness of his diabolical treachery. She felt that his sins were amenable to no human law; and as to the higher tribunal, which takes cognizance of moral crimes, he would dare to set aside its condemnation, scoffing at belief in its inexorable judgment or its power to inflict punishment. With burning shame she acknowledged that her fatal imprudence justified his audacious avowal of their engagement; but her indignation at his treachery towards Agatha overcame, for the moment, the consciousness of mortification

which this avowal was calculated to arouse in the presence of those friends whose respect she valued.

"Mr. de Rouay," she said, in clear, low tones, "I wonder that you dare stand in the presence of gentlemen and acknowledge that you have forfeited every claim to their respect. If I understand you aright, the loss of my wealth is as nothing compared to the greater misfortune which your words imply. Mrs. Wilbraham—"

"Is your mother, Miss Featherstone."

Kitty gave one piteous look around, and, holding out her arms to John Maribel, she cried, "John, dear John!"

In a moment the faithful friend was by her side. He supported her to the window, placed her in a chair, while Mrs. Covington, with anxious solicitude, chafed her cold hands, and attempted to comfort her in a gentle, motherly way.

In the meantime, Col. Covington turned upon De Rouay. "A man, sir," he said, "is bound to respect moral obligations. Yours, it strikes me, are stringently binding to Mrs. Wilbraham; to her, exposure means both shame and ruin. Think of her, as she is to-day—the envied wife of a proud and high-born gentleman, secure in all those advantages of fortune which marriage has brought to her; think of her as she will be when she knows that you have treacherously denounced her. See her bowed with disgrace—her dearly bought respectability gone—her very name a scorn and a by-word.

Think of her in her shamed maternity, shorn in the first moment of acknowledgment of her right, even to her child's respect ; and think, sir, of that noble gentleman who has placed all his faith and reliance in this woman—who has with chivalrous loveliness put aside the conventional judgments of his mind, and taken her upon her own showing—think of this man with the promise of fair honors in the career of which he has chosen—with the adjuncts of birth and education and wealth, all crushed out in overwhelming shame. Mr. de Rousy," he exclaimed, taking a step towards him in the excitement of his passion, "among all the wrongs which your fellow-beings have suffered at your hands—and I wish I could think they are few—this will be the foulest."

"Your words are eloquent, Col. Covington, and in my heart I believe you to be sincere—unpleasantly so, sir, for your climax reaches a personality. I have a slight objection to this. I confess that my moral vision is bounded by a strong bias towards self-protection—a not unusual trait of human nature—and that my knowledge of it rejects all divining conjecture of what may be beyond its natural instincts. In this instance, my natural instinct is to assume to myself the privilege of acting after the prompting of my—if you will—perverted judgment ; and that points out to me the tangible advantage of fortune and the damned nonsense of what is called chivalric generosity. Can you suppose, sir, that I am going to give

up a fortune which it has been the object of my life to obtain?"

"No, sir," the old gentlemen answered in thundering tones, "I suppose no such a thing. You are a——"

"One moment, Colonel," interposed Mr. Smiley. "Permit me to say a few words before concluding this very disagreeable business." Mr. Smiley had been intently examining papers which De Rousy had handed to him. "I entreat a further forbearance, my dear sir," he added, placing his hand upon the old gentleman's shoulder.

"Forbearance," he shouted, taking out his red foulard handkerchief with a flourish, "forbearance—yes, until he is well out of my house."

"By George! Smiley," cried Mr. McStebbins, "are you coming in now with your buts and *probabilities*?"

"I am endeavoring, gentlemen," he replied with dignity, "to perform a duty towards my clients, for as yet you have taken much for granted, and it is my desire to show you that overwhelming testimony turns everything in Mr. de Rousy's favor. I only wish, sir," he added, turning to Mr. McStebbins, "that I could rebut this testimony. Ethan Featherstone in his testamentary provisions in behalf of his son's child, with full knowledge of the mother's character, imposed—as you remember—the most rigid and inexorable conditions upon their execution. These had especial reference to Frances Agatha Featherstone, whom, I am sorry to say, I identify with Mrs. Wilbraham."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Covington; "didn't I tell you, Colonel, how it would all turn out!"

"Upon her conduct," continued Mr. Smiley, "and her act on, hangs the inheritance of the child which Dr. Maribel found alone and forlornly miserable in the grim companionship of the dead old man. Any infraction, then, of the conditions which Ethan Featherstone imposed upon his daughter-in-law on that terrible night when she, a mother, was called upon to forswear her own child, and that by an oath the most fearful and agonizing to a mother's heart, would necessarily annul the universal bequest of his estate to the child, leaving her with only a trifling annuity, and conveying the whole of his possessions to his nephew, Gaston, only surviving child of his sister, Agnes Featherstone, by her lawful husband, Charles Alphonse de Ferrière. Mr. de Roussy, or I should say Mr. de Ferrière, has evidently thoroughly prepared himself for the consummation of his plans. To establish his identity, he has with silent but untiring industry procured all the necessary authentic evidence of the lawful marriage of Agnes Featherstone to Mr. de Ferrière, and of the issue from that wedlock of a son, whose identity in his own person he fully establishes by registry of birth, baptismal certificate, *affidavits* of nurses, attendants, tutors, and other collateral evidence required by the legal exigencies of the case. On account of an unpleasant difficulty at Wiesbaden, the particulars of which were freely discussed

in the clubs of London and Paris, it became necessary for Mr. Gaston de Ferrière to abandon his former haunts and to assume a name and disguise which would shield him from the vengeance of the Herzog family. This accounts for my having so completely lost sight of him that I imagined him dead, and for my being totally unprepared for a denouement which leaves me the most unpleasant task which it has ever been my duty to perform—that of declaring Mr. Gaston de Ferrière the lawful heir of Ethan Featherstone. I make this declaration from a conviction that with such evidence as he possesses it would be useless to oppose his claims; although I am at your service, Miss Featherstone," he said, turning to Kitty, who made no sign of having heard his words. Then he drew his thin lips tightly over his teeth, and whispered to De Ferrière, as we shall henceforth call him: "By Jove, sir! I wouldn't like to stand in your shoes to-day!"

De Ferrière arched his brows until they almost reached the roots of his hair, while a movement of the shoulders clearly expressed the very slight importance which he attached to the lawyer's outburst of temper. While human nature lasts, there will always be much that is low and bad in its component parts; and it would have required metaphysical subtlety to have discovered any latent virtue in the complicated intricacies of this man's character. Mr. Smiley, however, with no mean knowledge of the world, actually entertained in his own mind the possibility

of reaching some untried sentiment in the heart of De Ferrière—some finer trait of humanity beneath the polished insolence of his tone and manner. His own earnest feeling in the matter drew him into error, for in his long intercourse with mankind he had learned that human virtue and excellence are absorbed and lost in the voracious sea of self-interest, as are the streams and rivers that flow to the ocean. He was prevented from receiving one of those rebuffs which a man is apt to meet when he judges through a medium of personal feeling, rather than from that knowledge which analyzes the complex motives of human actions, by the entrance of Col. Covington accompanied by Mr. Featherstone.

"Permit me," said the Colonel, "to present to you Mr. Oscar Featherstone, so long an absentee that his oldest acquaintances had well-nigh forgotten his existence."

A thunder-bolt falling in the midst of the company could have caused no greater shock than was experienced by those assembled there at this sudden and unexpected phase. Mr. Featherstone alone seemed calm and self-possessed; a fitful glow in his cheek, and the fond glance of his eye towards Kitty, were the only indications which he manifested of the exceeding great joy of this moment to which he had so long looked forward.

John Maribel stepped forth and shook Mr. Featherstone heartily by the hand, saying, with a slight tremor in his voice: "For eighteen years Kitty has been the sole

interest of my life. I yield her to you, sir, and rejoice for her sake that one so truly good and noble is henceforth to be her protector." Poor fellow, he said this and walked out of the room; while Mrs. Covington with gentle force assisted Kitty to rise from her seat, and led her bewildered and half-reluctant towards her father, who stood with outstretched arms waiting to fold her to his heart.

"God be thanked!" cried the old lady. "He has saved the innocent lamb from the wolf."

And then a silence fell upon them, broken only by Mrs. Covington's sob, and an occasional sniff from Mr. McStebbins, as he wiped his eyes with his perfumed handkerchief. Col. Covington stood at the window looking very hard at something—perhaps it was at the peacock, which chose that moment to spread its feathers, and so he did not perceive Mr. de Ferriere scathing the company with eyes which flashed, as if in mortal challenge, as he left the room.

We also will close the door, if you please, upon this scene.

CHAPTER LIII.

"OH, HELP! NO, LIGHT! A SURGEON!"

"Had doth it seem; but nought is really sad,
Or only such, that we may better bear;
We should be very grieved of grief be glad,
The great intents of God could we but see."

"Hush!" sighed Miss Eleanor, closing Coleridge, "writers are apt to attribute personal unities to imaginary aggregates; and I wish that I, a small unit in God's vast human family, could feel in my own especial case that my trials are to work out for me or mine some special good."

The pale, worn face, with lines about the mouth so strongly drawn, and eyes so full of anxious trouble, was lacking in rounded contour and freshness of coloring; but it possessed the beauty which comes with the martyrdom of self-abnegation and unselfish renunciation, which shone round about it like the glory which the old masters loved to paint around the heads of their saints. Since the time that beside their father's coffin Eleanor had knelt with Hugh's curly head pressed close to her bosom, and his

wild sobe breaking her heart, she had put away the dreams of maidenhood and consecrated her life to him. The *summum bonum* of her earthly happiness consisted in the fulfilment of certain ambitious hopes secretly entertained for his honor and aggrandizement. She had the firmness and strength of will to endure, and patience to wait. Through long years she had with a firm hand held the reins that governed the little kingdom of which she had been sole mistress, and her calm and watchful judgment, added to her admirable self-control, had saved Wilbraham's estate from the pillage of agents and overseers. Rarely speaking of what she did, with beautiful modesty she often permitted others to assume the merit which was justly her own.

The garden violet, hid away beneath thick clustering leaves, permeates the air with delicious fragrance. As unobtrusive as is this lovely flower—so often cited to represent the sweetness of humility—as fragrant as its breath, were the virtues which crowned Eleanor Wilbraham. How is it, dear reader, that a quiet, encouraging, helpful spirit, giving out instinctively, and exacting little in return, seldom finds any recreation until it is too late for it to know the kind words and pleasant thoughts that come with the flowers which deck the coffin? Little does it matter then.

The tear which falls upon the inanimate face, the summing up of her virtues, the recital of her gentle deeds of

love and unobtrusive charities—all come like mockery to the dead woman whom no one took pains to please or encourage while she lived. Some of us have known such a woman, apparently the least important member of the family; yet in reality the busy fairy who darned and mended and dusted, putting things in their right places, and pouring the blessed oil of thoughtful care into the grooves of household machinery, making it all to run so smoothly that no one seemed to suspect her agency or to give a thought to the matter, any more than we think of thanking God for the sunshine. It is a very beautiful thing to give to the dead the sweetness of kind memories, and to weave a garland of virtues which we reverently place upon the grave. This is *post-mortem* kindness. We satisfy ourselves; but the still heart which lies beneath the sod knows nothing of it. If we had taken the same pains while she lived, we might have lightened her burden and gladdened her faithful heart. Miss Eleanor Wilbraham, I dare say, has elicited little interest from the reader—a plain, middle-aged woman, neither brilliant nor accomplished, whose presence we would scarcely have noticed in the drawing-room, and whose exit from my story might have taken place without exciting serious regret or violating the rules of constructive art; and yet I will have performed my task but poorly should I fail to enlist a kind thought for her, or to gather a tear to your eye at recollection of some such woman, remembered now

with just that tender regret which your own shortcomings towards her arouse in your conscious heart.

Miss Eleanor sat in her chamber, listening to every sound which betokened her brother's coming, for Agatha had left home the evening before on pretence of going to meet her husband. We have seen whither she went. Once or twice the anxious woman had gone to the window to look with wistful eyes in the direction whence she expected the carriage to come. Her waiting-woman, Hester, had been in and out of the room, seeking various pretexts for remaining near her mistress. For years Miss Eleanor had been subject to heart-disease—*hypertrophy* of the heart, Dr. Maribel called it. Hester had her own reasons for being anxious about her mistress. The carriage had returned before Miss Eleanor was awake. There was a letter for her, which the coachman refused to deliver to Hester, saying that his orders from Mrs. Wilbraham were to give it into Miss Eleanor's own hands.

"You may keep it, then," exclaimed Hester; "no letter, nor nothing else, is a going into that room this day. I've had my orders from Dr. Maribel, and knows what I'm about."

Babet, sorely ill at ease, had also been watching Mrs. Wilbraham's return, and while thus engaged she saw some one riding furiously up the avenue whom she had not expected to see, and dismounting from his horse with a black

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scowl on his face. Her quick suspicions were instantly aroused, and she ran out into the hall in time to meet De Ferrière going to his room.

"Where is your mistress?" he growled.

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur!* do you not know that Madame went away last evening to meet her husband?"

"Her husband! the devil! I returned late from town last night, and supposed your mistress to be asleep in her bed."

"*Monsieur* did not perhaps expect Mr. Wilbraham so soon?"

The mischievous twinkling in her eyes and the cunning smile which accompanied her words irritated De Ferrière almost beyond the bounds of self-control.

"Go and find out when these people are expected to arrive," he said, opening the door of his bed-room, and slamming it to again with angry force.

Babet found Sabra in the kitchen, busy preparing a feast to celebrate her master's return; but her temper seemed to have partaken of the pungency of the spices which she was pounding in a marble mortar, for she gave out her orders to her assistants in sharp, quick tones, and looked as grim as Cerberus when Babet asked when Mrs. Wilbraham was expected.

"The carriage has come back. You might have known that without bothering me with questions. I've got no time to be asking of them. There's one thing sure:

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Mrs. Hugh ain't a-coming home to find that Sabra has forgot how to do Virginny cooking!"

"Uncle Steven is out to the stable, Miss Babet," volunteered one of the girls. "Maybe he can tell you why he's come back with the carriage."

"And Madame, where is she?" shrieked Babet.

Not waiting for a reply, she flew to the stable-yard, where Steven was busy cleaning the mud from the harness. In answer to her question, he said that he had "fetched" a doctor, but positively declined to give it into her hands.

We all know how Samson was shorn of his strength by Delilah, how Hercules was stripped of his manhood by Omphale, and how Mr. Thackeray has shown that a bravo general may be converted into a weak tool by an ugly, yellow old woman. These examples prepare us for poor Steven's want of faithfulness when he placed Mrs. Wilbraham's letter in the hands of the French woman. Having possessed herself of the letter, Babet proceeded at once to deliver it to Miss Eleanor.

Meanwhile, Hester had been sent to inquire about a sick servant. Thus it happened that the poor lady was alone when Babet knocked at her door. She was sitting with closed eyes and clasped hands, listening for the step which never in this world was she to hear again.

Babet came forward holding out the letter, while Miss Eleanor started, half rose, then sank back again, looking

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so pale and agitated that Babet retained the letter for a moment, saying:

"It is nothing, *Miss Eleanor*; only a note from Mrs. Wilbraham."

"Give it to me," she said, in a voice so feeble that the words were scarcely audible. "Leave me while I read it."

"Madame has perhaps sent some message—she left so suddenly," urged the *femme de chambre*.

"Go," exclaimed Miss Eleanor, this time in a louder and firmer tone.

With baffled curiosity, Babet turned and left the room.

The letter was closely written, and she leaned forward that the light might fall on the writing. No one will ever know whether she had mastered its contents; for when Hester opened the door, she lay prostrate on the floor, the letter still grasped in her hand.

Her meeting with her brother was postponed into eternity.

CHAPTER LIV.

"SO I'LL DIE FOR THEE, OH, IMOLEN!"

DURING the consternation and confusion consequent upon so awful an event, no one had thought of the fatal letter, which a servant had taken from the floor and laid on a table. Babet, anxious to possess herself of it, ventured into the room with the *air de circonstance* suitable to one very much shocked and grieved, and while she proffered service, which was coldly rejected, she managed to transfer the letter from the table to her pocket without exciting observation. Being unable to read English, she sought De Ferrière, whom she found in the confusion of preparation for immediate departure. After he had addressed and sealed the note which he had been engaged in writing when she entered the room, he looked up, exclaiming:

"Ah! what have you there, Babet?"

"Something that may be of service to you and to me, monsieur," she answered, giving him the letter.

"Ha! another imprudence of malice!" and he read, with curling lip, the passionate confession of Agatha, in which he detected the restless imprudence of desperation.

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De Ferrière was quick to see the advantage which the possession of this letter would give him in dealing with Wilbraham. He was well aware that delicate sensibility to disgrace, and a natural shrinking from having his unfortunate family affairs made public, would strongly incline him to accept means which offered immunity from them. He quietly secured the letter in his pocket-book, while Babet stood looking at him with rage and disappointment tearing at her heart. She was prompt at seizing a truth applicable to a train of reasoning based upon a somewhat discolored view of human nature, and she comprehended with bitter self-condemnation that folly and stupidity had lost her the advantage which his ready perception of gain had led him so unscrupulously to appropriate.

"Babet," he said, "do you know that you have committed a serious offence in purloining this letter. I consider it my duty to place it in the hands of Mr. Wilbraham."

"*Mais, monsieur!*" she gasped, growing very pale.

De Ferrière vouchsafed no further notice of her, but turned his back and spoke to the servant who was packing his clothes at the farther end of the room.

"Leave those things," he said, "and go at once to Oaklands with this letter. Deliver it to Mr. Featherstone, and say that you wait an answer. Bring it to me without delay, and a silver half-dollar will be your reward."

Cupidity is inventive, and Babet set about at once to find some other means for turning Mrs. Wilbraham's flight to profit. An examination of her wardrobe and jewel case suggested itself to her mind, and for this purpose she proceeded to the deserted room to find everything securely locked and the keys nowhere to be found. In her search, she discovered on the toilet table an envelope addressed to herself, inclosing a sum of money sufficient to defray her expenses back to France, and a liberal amount besides.

"*Imbécile!*" she exclaimed, striking her forehead.

Imbécile! And then the picture of a neat little shop with the name of Mademoiselle Babet coulon, *couturière en robes*, placed over the door in gilt letters, impressed itself on her mental vision, and caused another desperate search for the missing keys. She expended a good deal of energy in thought and action, which, proving abortive, was the more exhaustive and irritating. The strain upon her nerves naturally resulted in an outburst of hysterical weeping, and with a sense of overwhelming injustice and injury she sank on a satin-covered chair and gave her thoughts to the serious consideration of her future. Her reflections resulted in a determination to appeal to Wilbraham. Every human being has some peculiar propeller to the motive of his actions, and the bias of corrupt natures is clearly revealed in the course which they choose, to compass their ends. Misfortune at once offers temptation to inhumanity, and cruelty exults in its power to wound the

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downfallen. Pocketing Mrs. Wilbraham's generous gift, Babet proceeded to the kitchen, where she found Sabra sobbing in a corner, all thought for Man Hugh's coming home obliterated in her grief for the loss of her beloved mistress. Groups of dusky figures gathered about the doors, and men and women spoke in hushed whispers of the sudden sorrow which had fallen upon the family. All work was suspended everywhere—cries and lamentations went forth from the faithful hearts of those who knew that in Eleanor Wilbraham they had lost a tender friend.

Babet, astonished and frightened by this manifestation of affectionate grief, and knowing that she was looked upon with disfavor by the house-servants, was about to retrace her steps, when Steven, from whom she had obtained the letter, espied her.

"Here's your half-dollar," he cried, taking it from his pocket. "It's the devil's money, and has brought us bad luck. If it wasn't for you, Miss Eleanor wouldn't be lying dead upstairs."

"Yes, it's her and her likes as has brought all this trouble on us," said a mulatto, with face all blistered with weeping.

Shaking his cyclopean fist at the terrified *femme-de-chambre*, he bade her begone. "Don't you tempt me," he cried, "to tear out your lying and deceitful tongue."

Babet, frightened beyond all self-control, fled to De Ferrière, entreating his protection.

"Go to your room," he said, "and lock yourself in. You have incurred the displeasure of those people. I cannot answer for the consequences."

When she was gone, he sat watching the clock on the mantel, until suspended expectation grew intolerable, and he determined to go out and meet the messenger whom he had sent to Oakland.

At the door of his own room he paused, the action giving utterance to some thought which caused his face to assume a more pallid hue. His dressing-case was still unpacked, and from it he took a small silver-mounted revolver, which he secured in the breast pocket of his coat. It was a precautionary measure, suggested by his knowledge of the very equivocal position which he held in the opinion of most people, and the decided dislike with which he was regarded by those who knew the circumstances of Abby Blackwell's death.

The house was now filled with friends and neighbors who had hastened to do the last kind offices to Eleanor Wilbraham, and De Ferrière, shunning observation, stole out by a side entrance, taking a secluded path which led to the summer-house, and thence to a road principally used by wagons conveying wood to the house. A fierce impatience seized him as he strode forward, and he broke away with angry force the overhanging branches which impeded his free course.

The air turned chill as he walked along the unfre-

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quieted road, and shadows grew dark in the dusk of the gloaming. What were his thoughts—what memories were lashing him into remorse? Everywhere—through the shadowy wood—down in the depths of the tangled copse, and where the crystal ripples curled over their pebbly bed, softly murmuring among the sedges and water-lilies—everywhere, in low, wailing monotone, a voice reached his ear, searching into the very depths of his being.

"That hour a horror fell on him,
A crawling terror shook each limb,"

and it was with a sense of intense relief that he came out on the broad highway. Who will assume to gainsay the assertion that there exists some mysterious agency which forewarns; and although in most cases its warning is available to no definite purpose of protection, yet the mind is readily cognizant of its existence, and can look back with certainty to times and events when such warning has been the forerunner of misfortune.

De Ferrière stood still in the middle of the road. He saw Perry Deane rapidly approaching from the opposite direction. There was menace and danger in the firm-set jaw and flashing eye as he stopped before him. "False, black-hearted villain!" he cried. "You thought to escape me. I went to Oakland, and you were not there; but I have heard enough to make me glad to crush you now, as I would a poisonous snake."

The stout cudgel which he carried was raised above De Ferrière's head, and would have fallen with unerring fury had he not averted the blow by springing backward out of its reach. Quick as thought the revolver was drawn from his breast; there was a flash, a report, and the dull thud of a falling body striking the earth. De Ferrière's heart gave a great bound of savage joy—the cruel exultation of satisfied hate, only to recoil in strong revulsion as he saw his enemy unharmed, stooping over a prostrate figure stretched across the road.

At the same moment the messenger from Oakland reached the spot. De Ferrière caught savagely at the bridle of the horse, bidding the terrified negro dismount. He snatched the letter from his hand, and vaulting into the saddle, fled as though he knew that the dire Erinyes were howling on his guilty tracks. Meanwhile Perry, unmindful of de Ferrière's flight, was, with anguished heart, endeavoring to staunch the blood flowing from Jope's side. The unfortunate young man had received the ball intended for him.

"Go for help; run for your life, Tom," he cried. "My God! he will bleed to death!"

Poor, faithful Jope! He had gone with Perry to Oakland, and Kitty, hearing that he had expressed a wish to offer her his humble congratulations, went for him and presented him to her father as her good and faithful friend. Mr. Featherstone with delicate courtesy acknowledged

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his pleasure at seeing him, and begged that he would afford him an opportunity of assisting him in some way pleasing to himself; and Kitty spoke so sweetly to him that as he looked at her, radiant in her new-found happiness, the old feeling came back to him of having her perform the Juggernaut feat. This metaphorical crushing was but the expression in his own mind of a great and humble love. She had given him her little hand at parting, so soft and dimpled that he scarce dared to touch it with his; and when she took a gold chain from her own neck and placed it around his—oh! he thought that no one before had ever been so honored, and he found no words to thank her, only his tearful eyes looked into hers and spoke for him.

When Perry heard that De Perriero had left Oakland, he followed him in hot anger, determined to punish him for his lack of good faith. On finding that his friend had departed, Jopo set out at once in search of him, and was hastening to interpose between the two men whom he saw approaching one another when the fatal shot was fired which entered his breast. He was lying now in Perry's arms, his life-blood spurting from the wound, and his face so still and white that Perry bent his face close to his lips to satisfy himself that he was still breathing.

Yes, he was breathing, for the lips moved and he whispered:

"It's all up with me, Perry."

"Don't say that, Jopo. Keep up your courage,

dear boy, until the Doctor comes. He'll be here directly."

Perry's voice was choked, and a hot tear fell on the boy's face.

"O Perry!" he murmured, "don't you make it harder for me—don't you fret." He pained from weakness, and then added: "You are not to blame, and I don't mind it so much. I've often said as how I could die for *her*; and it seems as if my wish has come, for him as has killed me won't be troubling of her no more."

Perry drew him closer to his heart as he said, "I wish 'it had been me, instead of you, poor fellow!'"

"Don't say that, Perry. Uncle Black and Aunt Susan want you. I used to wish to go away from them. I was hankering after the 'song and dance' but, now—I—am—going—where—I'll—get—what—I—want—I—reckon."

The eyes closed—a great weakness had come over him, for in spite of Perry's efforts his life was ebbing fast.

"It's all along of her. I stood it so long—the old shop—the search-aga. Tell her my last breath was to pray for her, and give—my love—my—humble—love—Perry—I see them coming there—there—Lord, Lord!"

He raised his fading sight to heaven, and Perry's glance followed the direction of the dying boy's, to see only the vast blue dome with its myriad stars above them. He, who was putting on immortality alone possessed the

power to see the brightness which preceded the dawn of the new life, or to catch the vision of the green pastures and still waters. When Perry looked down again, the placid face was white and fixed, and the strong man wept aloud, holding the dead boy in his arms.

Faithful, honest Jopo!—dear, tender heart! We mingle our tears with those which were shed for you, and say from our inmost heart, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord hath not imputed sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

CHAPTER LV.

"OH, PARDON ME FOR BRINGING THESE ILL NEWS."

GLORIOUS, indeed, is the world of God around us; but more glorious the world of God within us." Mrs. Parrott laid her spectacles on the book—the gold rimmed spectacles which Julia Maribel had given her on that Christmas morning so many years ago. There was the sound of a light footstep on the verandah, and while the old face brightened with expectation, her heart beat quicker with premonition of the heavy trial which awaited her. For days past she had

suffered the torture of suspense and dread; and when Agatha entered the room, agitation had taken away the power of uttering a word of welcome.

The full light from the chandelier fell upon the form of Agatha, as with quick, nervous motion, she threw off shawl and bonnet, and stooping to kiss the old woman, said:

"I have come to say good-by."

Mrs. Parrott only looked at her, to find in her haggard, bloodless face the realization of her worst fears.

"Agatha," she said, "how you torture my poor heart! You know that my love has never yet failed you."

"It can avail me nothing now, mother," she cried, sinking on a seat beside Mrs. Parrott. "Oscar Featherstone lives."

The bitterness of her tone betrayed the hardening of a heart never keenly alive to virtuous instigations, and which in its renunciation of her child's love had lost its strongest incentive to good.

Mrs. Parrott gently placed her hand upon the bent head crowned with heavy braids of black hair—the hair which was once of the glorious *brunette* hue, rarely seen, save in gorgeous Venetian pictures. Her touch came to the wretched woman like the breath of a benediction; soothing like the consolation which enters into the heart with the consciousness of human sympathy. A great sob arose in Agatha's throat; but she choked it down, de-

terminated not to give way to the weakness of unavailing tears.

Mrs. Parrott understood it all. The inexorable fiat of retribution had gone forth against this woman. She was condemned by the world and by society. The pen of a Dumas may clothe the deformity of vice in alluring colors; may convert the depraved Parisian *lorette* into an attractive decoy for unhealthy sentimentality. The "moonlight of fancy" may raise a cannibal-decked shrine; but the laws of God stand firm—the gates of Eden are closed against those who violate them, and the Angel of Purity with glistening sword guards their approach. None knew better than Mrs. Parrott how slight is the tenure of the fallen upon the world's mercy. Not old Timon himself knew better than she, how under the ban of the world's condemnation one finds "the unkindest beast more kinder than mankind." Her thoughts went back to the old Italian city which had been her home when the strange adventure befell her which gave to her the child that in a great measure had compensated for that other joy of which her barren life had never tasted. Then she remembered how she had drawn from her love for this child, comfort and consolation in hours of fearful trial and grief; her first struggles with poverty, and the fierce combat with the cruel demon—starvation; and then, in natural sequence, the necessity which forced her to yield up her darling Agatha to the trials and temptations of the stage.

To a woman like Agatha the profession was one of alluring temptation and dangerous fascination. The glare, the movement, the excitement of such a life, acted as a fatal stimulant upon her impetuous and passionate nature. Possessed of all which the world adulates, she soon learned to live in its smiles and to draw from its adulation a fatal and delicious enjoyment. A taste for luxury was engendered, and her wild extravagance brought on serious money troubles. At this juncture she met young Mr. Featherstone, a reputed millionaire, and by low intrigue and a shameful deception she inveigled him into a marriage. Then followed her brief married life and its scandalous denouement; then her abandonment of her child. At this point of retrospection the current of Mrs. Parrott's thoughts turned towards her own share in the outrage which John Marbel had suffered at their hands. Oh, would the attachment which had ripened during the long years of their association speak to John's heart in her behalf, and draw from the affluent kindness of his nature the forgiveness which she craved! A movement from Agatha startled her. She had, perhaps, grown impatient of the painful silence; or, more likely, could bear no longer the sting of her own thoughts, and had risen to her feet, apparently calm and quite self-possessed.

"Mother," she said, "believe me when I say that I am not ungrateful; and that while it costs me a sore pang to part from you, there is a certain satisfaction to me"—she

smiled bitterly "in knowing that your declining years may be spent apart from my own troubled and erring life. I don't know that I am acting wisely in prolonging it; but my craven heart refuses me the courage which is needful. I would rather face life with what it may have in store for me, than the horror of death with its appalling uncertainty."

"Oh, Agatha! have pity on me," cried the poor old woman, impotent to do more than raise her withered hands towards her wretched daughter in a gesture of entreaty.

"I pity you so much," continued Agatha passionately. "Why did you not let me die beside my mother? What tempted you to take a child to your heart, who was destined to be the shame and misery of your life? I pity you so much," she vehemently reiterated, "that I have determined never again to disturb the tranquillity of your life, never—never! You know me too well to suppose that I have played the part of a noble and disinterested heroine, who leaves her injured husband as poor as she came to him, with her wedding-ring suspended to a chain about her neck. No; I have brought away money and jewels, and with common prudence, may, at least for a while, live in comfort. No one need be friendless with a well-filled purse." She drew forth her jewelled watch. The hour had expired which she had allotted for the interview—the moment of parting was one of terrible trial to her, and she stood with her teeth going deep into her

nether lip, her hands tightly clasped together, and her heart panged with remorseful regret as she gazed upon the livid, suffering face of her adoptive mother. With sudden violence she threw herself on her knees before her, and drawing down the old face to hers, kissed it passionately. She felt that, for the last time on earth, she was claiming a love which was pure and unselfish, and that this "parting was death, as far as life was concerned." Rising to her feet, she snatched her bonnet and shawl from the sofa on which she had thrown them, and went out, never turning once to look at the poor old woman, stricken and mute in her despair.

CHAPTER LVI.

"'T WAS HIS QUEEN, HIS QUEEN!"

WE will not linger over the sad events which brought two funeral cortèges to the church-yard on the same day—that church-yard shut in with towering pines meaning the requiem of the dead. So quiet—so peaceful, away from the haunts of men, alone with God and with Nature. No poet has immortalized its sanctity. Unlike the old church-yard of Stoke Pogis, no

elegy has been conceived within its hallowed precincts ; but there are loving hearts, eloquent of that fervor which Gray has so beautifully expressed—memories which grow more tender and sacred with time—memories which make us better and holier, bringing us nearer to those friends who are waiting there for us.

Reverently we close the gate and pluck a spray from the woodbine which clambers over the hedge, turning to breathe a last farewell, and then go on our way through forest road, overarched with meeting branches ; across the mill brook, and down by the mill where the busy saw has ceased its humming, and the crystal water drips from the great wheel—by the old Featherstone house, standing gloomy in its solitude, and then over hills and through shadowy vales—by fields and smiling gardens with white houses rising in their midst, and gleaming lights and happy voices coming through open doors and windows—by the smithy with its glowing forge—by the garing new railway station, and then to the old inn under the china trees, all gold in their autumn hue—the queer old Red Tavern, just as it stood eighteen years ago, opening wide its hospitable doors and bidding us heartily welcome. The room within is all aglow with light from a blazing fire, which has been kindled to keep out the chill creeping in through open doors and windows ; and good Triggs is there—we are glad to see him again—his round face suffused with smiles, and his rotund figure clothed in that best coat, which only

comes out of the cedar chest on rare and important occasions. If a trifle too tight, and somewhat antiquated in fashion, it is still as good as new, and the "old woman" is proud to see him wear it so bravely.

Mrs. Triggs has donned her smartest cap and new black alpaca, and is just now falling into ecstasies over Miss Catharina Featherstone, who looks exceedingly pretty in her travelling costume.

"Gracious goodness!" she exclaimed, "to think that this is the same, identical little thing—grewed up as pretty as a rose. Don't things turn out? I'd hardly believe my eyes if I didn't see Dr. John a-standing looking so natural like"—which, by the by, was a mistake, for a sad face was quite unnatural to John Maribel; but Mrs. Triggs, being in such good spirits, saw him in all probability through the haze of her own cheerfulness. "Oh, sir!" she continued, turning to Mr. Featherstone, "if you had seen him, as likely a young man, and as fair-spoken as you ever set eyes on, a-warming of her little feet, and everybody a-looking and wondering. The stage stopped here in them days, sir; that's how Triggs and I are comfortable in our old age, and the passengers was all a-drinking and a-warming of themselves, and Dr. John was a-feeding of her with jam, and she said in the sweetest way, 'Oo's dodd, John.' Dear me! It seems like I can't believe my eyes, only she's the same pretty creature."

"I'll convince you of my identity, dear Mr Triggs," laughed Kitty, "by acknowledging that I am still fond of Jan, and that I have not changed my opinion about John."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Mr. Triggs, who looked as if he was about to propose a set of resolutions; but thinking better of it, instantly, with great heartiness, suggested that Dr. Maribel should run for Congress.

"I will be content with a much less decided and flattering expression of the good-will of my countrymen," answered John; "only let them continue to believe that I carry health in my saddle-bags and the best of intentions in my heart, and I shall be satisfied."

Kitty moved nearer to John and whispered, "Are you still obdurate?"

"Quite, Miss Featherstone," he said, assuming a playful tone, "Now that I have placed you in the hands of your respected father, and the terrible responsibility of your guardianship is taken from my shoulders, I must really think of poor Aunt Parrott and my patients, whom I have sadly neglected of late."

"I thought, dear John——"

"Yes, Kitty, thank that I am your best and dearest friend." There was a husky tone in the voice, a moistening of the eye—her little hand was clasped in his, and then suddenly dropped. A hasty good-by to Mr. Featherstone, a word to Ursula, and John Maribel was gone.

Mr. and Mrs. Triggs watched him as he mounted his horse and rode away. Neither of them had spoken to him—there was that in his face which told them to respect his grief.

The mind accustomed to dwell upon the prospect of a beautiful future—to delight in the contemplation of those joys which make life a refreshing walk towards the gardens of eternity, revolts at the sudden extinction of its cherished hopes, at the ruthless tearing up of those bright flowers of the heart that were budding to expand and blossom into maturity. John Maribel had set himself resolutely against the temptation of his love, and in his unselfish uprightness he was silent, leaving the fair Catherine Featherstone untrammelled to go forth into a world where she might find a more fitting mate than the middle-aged Doctor, who had little to offer her save a life-long love; and Kitty, her heart yet bleeding from the terrible treachery of De Ferriere, and repentant of her great weakness in his regard—her pride shocked and humbled—her young life clouded by the shadow of a mother's shame—beautiful, gifted, rich as she was, in the purity of her heart thought that an alliance with herself could scarcely be thought of by an honorable man, and it was, perhaps, this feeling which gave to their parting so sad and painful a significance. Love sometimes is born with a pang as sharp as death. Kitty knew this in after years, when this love, grown stronger with absence, proved to her a solace

under trials and afflictions, which neither wealth nor beauty, nor gifts of heart, nor treasures of intellect, can avert.

That night Kitty—we like best thus to call her—departed from Mapleton with her father and Ursula; Mr. and Mrs. Triggs accompanied them to the station.

"Dear mol!" exclaimed the good woman, as Kitty waved them a last adieu. "She went away eighteen years ago. Dr. John carried her in his arms all the way to town—'twas Jim Perkins told me when he came back. You remember, husband, how it was snowing and sleeting, and the coldest night we've ever felt; and now she's gone, not to come back, I reckon. It seems like the Featherstones is unlucky; but she's the prettiest, winsomest young lady as I ever set eyes on, and it's a pity——"

"What, wife?"

"It's a shame and a pity, to think of Dr. John a-riding through the lonely night away from his happiness. I saw it in his face, that I did, husband, as plain as I see you now; and I know that he was a-giving up his all when he said good-by to Kitty Featherstone."

CHAPTER LVII.

"SO HUMBL Y TAKE MY LEAVE."

SHOULD the requirements of a work of fiction have been satisfactorily fulfilled, the reader is supposed to be in a pleasurable condition of anxious suspense, and I will, therefore, at once proceed to fill up the interval of the six eventful years which have passed since John Maribel's parting from Kitty.

I am well convinced that there is "no part of knowledge in fewer hands than that of discerning when to have done. By the time that an author has written out a book, he and his readers are become old acquaintances, and grow very loth to part; so that I have sometimes known it to be in writing as in visiting, where the ceremony of taking leave has employed more time than the whole conversation before." I will bear this in mind, and endeavor to make our leave-taking as brief as possible, asking as a concluding favor a generous indulgence should I have failed in that excellence which the antagonistic opinions of critical authorities has made somewhat difficult of definition. "Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world," says Sterne, "though the cant of

hypocrites may be the worse, the cant of criticism is the most tormenting." But the world is full of human hearts affluent with generous sympathy, of human brains capable of that liberality of judgment which will enable them to discern, while they willingly lend themselves to the enjoyment which the author has done his best to afford. The pang of parting does not end with the spoken good by. Rivals spring up—rivals who take the place of old friends; but memory is not always unfaithful—it reproduces with strange fidelity; and if in the future, dear reader, you can recall a pleasant hour spent over the pages which I have written, or revive your interest in the characters which I have portrayed, then parting, at least between us, does not mean death.

From vine-covered hills and olive gardens with the white *Bastides* in their midst, we look down upon Marseilles. We see the teeming quays crowded with sailors of every nationality—a forest of masts towering from the port, and far out on the blue Mediterranean the wanton wind swells the graceful *latter* bearing its freighted bark towards the fair isles of the *Ægean* sea, while the curving shores of the gulf of Lyons encircle the *Château d'If*, so fraught with historic interest as having been the prison of Mirabeau. While we are surveying the attractive scene, the steamer for Malta and Alexandria is receiving its freight and passengers, and the crowd gathered to witness its departure unmercifully jostles a man in shabby clothes,

whose haggard face is lit up by a pair of eager, hungry eyes, watching the carriages arriving with passengers from the East. There is a pressing forward of those behind, and the man is forced into close proximity to an elegantly attired woman, whose appearance has created the stir in the palpitating crowd. Her delicate hand, in its well-fitting pearl-gray glove rests upon the arm of a stout, set-necked-looking man wearing a *fer*. The shabby man is so near to her that her rich costume brushes his worn and faded garments—so near that his whispered words fall clearly upon her ear—so near that the delicate aroma of luxury sweeps over his senses, smothering as a burning insult—but *er* as death. She turns and looks at him for a moment with something of triumph in her glance, gathering her skirts away from him with a movement of disgust; at the same time she thrust her purse into his outstretched hand, saying: "I could have asked no better revenge than to give you *alma*."

When we take into consideration that this fabric of flesh and blood "is biased originally by the attributes and peculiarities of the fabric itself—by hereditary predispositions, by nervous idiosyncrasies, by cerebral development, by slow or quick action of the pulse, by all in which mind takes shape from the mould of the body," we cannot experience any great surprise at finding Agatha in company with an Egyptian officer, high in rank, belonging to the army of the Khedive. Her figure had expanded with a

becoming roundness of *embonpoint*, and was set off by one of those marvelous creations of the great Woman-Tempter, while her hair, rich in its original golden hue, needed no artificial means to give it a coloring which fashion loves to imitate. Captivating by the charm of irreproachable manner, seductive with that refined subtlety of worldly knowledge which gave her a power that she never abused, she had achieved the glaring reputation which caused men to stare at her when she rode in the Bois, and virtuous women to cast looks of curious interest on her flaunting luxury. The sword of Damocles hangs so long before falling that, in the case of such women, it seems altogether probable that some stronger support than a horse-hair retards the catastrophe. As long as they find slaves to serve their exquisite banquets, to cast jewels and gold at their feet, to offer them the poisonous incense of flattery, and to furnish the "purple couch" upon which they repose in arrogant security, so long will they refrain from lifting their eyes to the menacing doom—so long will they have immunity from punishment. About six months after Agatha's arrival in Egypt, during a review, an American officer in the service of the Khedive, attracted, doubtless, by her brilliant person, passed near to the carriage in which she sat. This man bore on his noble face the ineffaceable marks of care and sorrow, and his grizzled hair and beard contrasted strongly with the dark hue of his complexion bronzed by the ardent rays of an Egyptian sun. So changed were they both

in appearance, that recognition seemed scarcely possible; and yet their eyes meeting, by some mystical *rapport*, there was a flash of consciousness which caused the woman to grow pale beneath her rouge, and the man to wheel his horse so violently around, pressing the spurs with fury into his sides, that the bystanders made way before him in the greatest consternation.

In a distant land, an exile from a ruined home—even here Wilbraham found renewed evidence of the mistake of his youth, in the insolent presence of this woman.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"O GENTLE PROTEUS! LOVE'S A MIGHTY LORD."



HERE is no telling where the influence of a bad life ends. Death itself is no safeguard against the insidious poison, which is as fatal to human happiness as is the deadly nightshade to human life; and thus it happened that Catherine Featherstone, in her luxurious London home, with all the world *à genoux* before her, was continually tormented by a gaunt skeleton which did not confine itself to its closet, but went stalking about, thrust-

ing its horrid fingers in the face of every pleasure, sitting down at feasts, and mocking even at love itself. A great doctor was sent for; he, of course, knew nothing about the skeleton, and was a little puzzled to account for the young lady's loss of spirits, and want of appetite for the good things of life with which she was so abundantly supplied. He prescribed a tonic and change, so that these unfortunate people must perforce set out to seek for that which the doctor never dreamed that they wanted.

Kitty—for to us she must always be Kitty—protested against any more journeyings on the Continent. The thought of Paris was absolutely abhorrent to her. One day, in the *Bois*, she had met her skeleton, and it was after this *rencontre* that they had gone to London to live.

As poor Mr. Featherstone had often done before, he called Ursule into council.

"Where to go, monsieur?" she exclaimed; "as if you cannot see that Mademoiselle is bored by all these people—that she is longing and pining to go back to America, and—"

"I know what you would say, Ursule," he interrupted impatiently. "It is quite absurd to imagine that Catherine entertains other than an affectionate remembrance of Dr. Maribel."

"Pardon, monsieur, but you are a father, and I can well understand that you look to Miss Featherstone's making a match suitable to her position. Six years work great

changes in people—and such years as those six have been over there in America! Perhaps when Mademoiselle has seen Dr. Maribel, she will find that she can love Sir Michael Maxton without doing violence to her affection for him."

In the case of most young ladies, Ursule's reasoning would have applied; but it was quite a different matter with one who was obstinately and absurdly bent upon loving a middle-aged doctor, and who remembered now with bitter regret how little she had valued the great love wherewith he had loved her.

To Miss Featherston's secret delight, it was settled that they were to return to America, and from that moment so wonderful a change came over her that the doctor declared that he had never known his favorite tonic to work so prompt a cure. Kitty laughed. She had not tasted of the tonic for a week, but day and night now was thinking of dear old John, and of the pleasant surprise which she had in store for him. When we think that she had had no news of him for four years, we cannot but admire her beautiful faith in his love and her confidence that God had taken him in his care. *Omnia vincit amor.*

The steamer was passing through the gateway leading to the grand and mighty metropolis of America. The deck was crowded with passengers, and exclamations in German, French, Italian and Spanish attested their delight in the unrivalled approach to New York. The shores of

Long Island and New Jersey were shimmering in the clear sunlight, and the curving hills of Staten Island lay blue in the distance. The water was leaping and foaming about the great black hulk that moved onward towards the swarming wharf, where a bustling, eager multitude awaited those coming from across the sea. Kitty took in each detail with silent delight. Now that the great rolling ocean separated her from her skeleton, she breathed more freely, and gave herself up to pleasurable thoughts and anticipations. In the wild freshness of the breeze, with life and movement all about her, her eyes sparkled, the crimson lips curved into smiles, the color mantled her cheek, until more than one eye turned in admiration upon the beautiful American girl.

CHAPTER LIX.

"SUCH IS THE FULNESS OF MY HEART'S CONTENT."



WE will leave Mr. and Miss Featherstone to find their way to the hotel, and satisfying ourselves by reference to the morning *Herald* that we have the right address, set out to seek the office of our dear

old friend John Maribel. We ring the bell, and are ushered into a shabby little waiting-room. Just at this moment the Doctor is engaged with a patient. His hand rests upon the curly head of a pale boy seated on his mother's lap—his left hand, for the sleeve of the right arm hangs empty. From the window the light falls on his face—the same bright, honest face, with its clear blue eyes, and we are surprised that he looks no older. As if a fairy breath had blown a mist of powder towards him, which had gently settled on his close-curling locks, they are whitened, and disordered as of yore, from the trick which he has not lost, of thrusting his fingers through them.

Untying the corner of her pocket-handkerchief, the woman takes out her little fee, and offers it to the Doctor, who holds his hand a little eagerly, the woman thinks, with a sigh of disappointment. He had spoken so kindly to her that she thought, perhaps—— Well, never mind. He had turned his back upon her, and we see him take a stick of candy from a jar on the mantel shelf, and wrap it, together with the money, in a piece of brown paper; and then, with a most unconscious air, place it in the poor little hand of the sick child, saying: "There, Franky, don't make yourself sick by eating the whole at one time. Candy is good to take the taste of medicine out of a little boy's mouth. You'll bring him again, Mrs. Mohan, the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir, and God bless you!" for Franky, with

childish eagerness, had opened the paper and she saw what the good Doctor had done.

Oh, John, John! By how many hundreds of such actions have you sunk your stock in trade! and really, are the returns available? I think that I see his blue eyes turning towards us in reproachful remonstrance.

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One night, not so very many years ago—a night marked by an awful calamity—the moonlight stole through the tangled copses of the Wilderness, revealing masses moving into position and preparing for the day's bloody struggle. A mighty chieftain, the soul and mainspring of the gathering hosts, directed this movement in face of a enemy on the qui vive, with guns ready to belch forth their murderous fire. Within an hour from that time he had fallen, and amid the roar of artillery, the tramp of terrified horses galloping wildly away from their riders, who were left moaning and dying, lying helpless under the burning hail of grape and canister, the hero, surnamed Stonewall, was being borne through the dense wood where treacherous grape-vines wound about the feet of the men bearing his litter, throwing them to the earth and adding to the horror of the hour a terrible chance of death, there in the tangled wilderness, to the captain of many battles. Finding further progress impracticable, the sorrowing and anxious cortège turned into the road, and as they passed they diverged in order to avoid a body lying in their path.

In their absorbing anxiety to reach a place of safety with their beloved general, these men scarce gave a thought to their wounded comrade, and for hours of that horrible night this man lay there conscious of his awful danger, hearing with ineffable dread the approaching tramp of maddened horses, the terrific explosion of shells which tore into more agonizing wounds the already mutilated bodies of the fallen. With almost superhuman exertion he had managed to drag himself into the wood, thinking to find protection from the sheltering trees, but here again, death in its most horrible form menaced him. An ominous crackling, a deep, sullen roar, apprised him of his danger. The forest was on fire. Lard light shone upon dying, upturned faces, and the lapping flames enveloped with greedy lust forms quivering in their death throes, cruelly lacerated and half torn to pieces.

A great tongue of fire shot out towards the cedar under which this man lay, a sharp heat like the breath of some vengeful demon touched his cheek, from the frizzling branches hot sparks fell in showers upon him. Face to face with an appalling death, half still, scorched and bleeding, he lay trying to resign his soul into the hands of Him who knew best why He made death so hard to him. He closed his eyes; it was too horrible! In all probability he fainted, for he was quite unconscious of being half dragged, half carried from the wood, and of a familiar voice calling upon him in tones of despairing and affec-

tionate grief. Indeed, for many days afterwards he knew no one and remembered nothing of all this horror. His first consciousness of life came to him with a sense of the loss of his right arm, and then he knew the man who sat beside him with bandaged face and hair scorched from off his head.

"Dear old fellow! you have been hurt," he murmured.

"Nothing to speak of. Don't talk, the surgeon says you mustn't."

As the days wore on, the memory of it all came back to him, and he learned how the man who nursed him day and night had saved him from the flames at the risk of his own life. This man was very silent about what he had done. He found his recompense in the looks which followed him with affectionate gratitude; in the tones which softened towards him with gentle pathos; in the silent pressure of the poor left hand. The day came when the man with the scarred face was ordered back to his regiment, and he who had lost his arm resigned his commission as colonel and applied for that of surgeon, that he might remain in the hospital. The poor fellows suffering from wounds and disease soon learned to appreciate his skill, and to take comfort in their manifold trials from his ever-cheerful words and patient example.

You have doubtless guessed who these men were. John Maribel is easily recognized; but, perhaps, you scarcely suppose the taciturn carpenter, Perry Deane, capable of

that exalted friendship which was faithful even unto death. Poor fellow! he was brought back to the hospital only a very few days after his departure thence, with both legs shattered and his life fast ebbing. Then "the boys" saw their good doctor stricken with poignant grief, and during the few hours which were left to Perry a respectful silence reigned throughout the vast dormitory, where so many others lay suffering and dying. The whispered "good-by" reached only the ear which was bent down to catch it, and with his hand firmly clasped in John's, the brave, humble man passed from a world which he did not regret, into that rest which to him was the satisfaction of long yearning--the casting off of a burthen grown heavier with the agonizing sense that life, if granted to him, would be but a hard submission to helplessness which might endanger the fidelity which consists in perfect obedience to that superior law which governs life.

* * * * *

Loneliness is an unpleasant companion to a man menaced with discouragement, and discouragement is the reflex of that good which exists in the human heart, and may lead to rebellion under an awakened sense of injustice. We will assume a privilege which is our own by virtue of our *métier*, and look over John Maribel's shoulder while he reads the letters which the postman has just left. They have, perhaps, aroused in him that active, human sympathy which is so strongly opposed to selfish repining, for

his face is expressive of grief and his hand trembles, making it difficult for the tearful eyes to discern the written characters. We read as follows:

MY DEAR JOHN:—

"Your letter found me most comfortably lodged in the *Rue Chateaubriand, Champs Elysées*, but Fate has again played me a spiteful trick, and Happiness, that deceitful jado, has fled, leaving me the unpleasant consciousness of having committed an egregious folly. Ah, John! how often the fierce school-dame, Experience, taps our knuckles in this little preparatory school, the world, and how stupidly we blunder on, little wiser for the correction. We learn at last how insignificant is the scope of this life compared to the infinity which stretches in awful magnitude beyond our mortal ken, far into the realms of Eternity. I stand now, John, on the borders of the valley which has pierced my heart with dread. Weak, uncertain, limited, full of imperfections in our nature, yet so intertwined with the inspiration of the Almighty that immortality becomes a fixed certainty to the soul, and the hope which it creates is our highest incentive to perfection. It is glorious to believe, John, that a wholly new and higher order of mental faculties will spring from the sub-strata of mortality, and that I shall be keenly alive then as now to those enjoyments which have filled up so large a portion of my life. You deem these speculations

idle! Well, perhaps the faculties which serve us here may not be put to analogous uses hereafter, but have you ever conceived of the developments of the high order of intellectual faculties, and of the exquisite enjoyment which may be derived from their full exercise. Am I an old Greek heathen, thinking of and prizing only the purely intellectual? No, no, John! A poor, weak old woman only, whose speculations have at last resolved themselves into a firm belief in her own worthlessness, and an humble trust in Him who assumed mortality for her sake. Speculation takes a weary course in and out and around truth, and rarely arrives at a conclusion which is not disputable. Pluck truth from the bottom of its well, and an army of *was*s will at once attack it, pulling it back and sinking it into profounder depths. I have been lugging at it all my life, with what result—how much wiser am I than Nellie Shum? A very fool in comparison, you will say, when I tell you that, unheeding her sound advice, I undertook, at my advanced age, the journey to Paris, to find the last bitter dregs of that cup which Fate has with spiteful persistency so often pressed to my unwilling lips.

"I am a very old woman, John, and my experience of life is, I hope, an exceptional one, for I find it hard to count my happy days; and even those were cheats, decked out in the tinselled finery of anticipation. It is difficult to conceive of a more serious calamity than that which

overwhelms a heart which screens itself behind the demi-obscurity of its æsthetic love for the beautiful in art as in nature, and through the soothing, mellow half-lights transfers to all things an unreality which clouds our mental vision from the rugged truth with regard to the moral defects of those whom we love. You understand me, John,—you know why I have garnered no treasures of wisdom. Poor, foolish, doting old woman! I am weeping amid my ruins, John, but from the shattered mass I have preserved one inestimable treasure—your love, John, and your forgiveness. Each day the reality of your self-denying generosity is palpable in the comforts which your allowance—liberal, I fear, John, beyond your present means—enables me to obtain.

"During the first days of my stay here I was conscious of a certain repression in Nellie's manner which created an unpleasant suspicion of a possible sense of triumph in the accomplishment of certain oft-repeated predictions; but when she witnessed my sorrow, John, how many innocent arts did she practice to conceal from me the bitter humiliation of knowing how much of the truth she comprehended.

"God in fashioning his creatures has often departed from the rules of beauty and symmetry and left the exterior of his wonderful creation without ornament,² to expend a larger share of His divine workmanship upon the soul which adorns and glorifies the interior. He has prepared

surprises for us everywhere. We do not discover them, because we wilfully ignore the possibility of a successful search. You know, John, that I have lived untrammelled by creeds. Some foolish people have called me an unbeliever, but I little heeded opinions which I knew to be slightly allied to conviction, or doctrine which was but the easy-fitting garb of habit. I have at least been sincere towards myself, and I have strong faith in the principles of ever-ruling mercy which tempers severity of judgment. Vindictiveness can have no part in the attributes of the Almighty, and the soul involuntarily, unconsciously yearning for light, will have its yearning satisfied. I am but a poor atom of that great and glorious Unity—God's Universe—and in the eternal evolution of mysteries I will have my share of enlightenment which will bring my soul into companionship with those who have beheld 'a day new risen.' The dawn of that day is near—very near, John.

"Eighty-three years! As I look back from the portals of Eternity—for they are opening for me—how brief they seem; and yet each moment of those years must influence, more or less, that supreme ending which brings us to the threshold of a great and glorious beginning.

"Dear John Maribel, true and faithful friend, good-by.

"Lovingly and gratefully,

"FRANCIS."

The effort to sign the name which for so many years she had renounced was probably the last one of her life. John Maribel reverently folds this touching adieu, and takes the other letter from the table. It is from Nellie Shea, and has evidently been indited under great mental tribulation.

"DEAR SIR AND HONORED DOCTOR:—

"She as was ground in her opinions to the end, and kept her mind to write to you the last words she ever spoke, dropped off without so much as giving me warning; as how should she, when she was called that sudden as never to speak a word to me as has served her faithful. She's dead and buried. The doctor said it was heart disease; but there's heart disease and heart disease, and the worse kind is when it comes on with shame and trouble as them who should love and honor brings it. It's just a crack and a snap, and all is over. I've known two good women to go off with it—Miss Eleanor and her as I can't bear to write her name; and she as caused all this trouble is a-riding in carriages, dressed in satins and silks, with her hair shining like gold, and as much like another woman as the same woman can be. She can laugh and sing, and them two dead, and the living ones a-holding down their heads in shame. The funeral was every way proper. I am free to say it would have been more agreeable to my

own feelings, and I know acceptable to yours, to have done otherwise, that is, plain and decent, but paid for honest, as I am sure nothing is; as we run a wild-goose chase, to come to with tossing and sickness as never was—a thousand miles and miles of it with never a minute of satisfaction to be got. I'll bless the day when I set foot again on your door-step, which I know you need a careful woman to look after you, as never could look out for yourself.

"She as I would rather not mention has acted handsome; but I never touched a dollar. I sent it back. I am no hand at writing. My poor old mistress tried hard to teach me; but I've always had a stupid head for learning, and so, as in duty bound, I'll wait to tell you more when I see you, as will be soon, if I live to get back, which chances stand against me.

"With duty and respect, and hoping there's no mistake about the address, I am,

"Your faithful servant,

"NELLIE SHEA."

The most docile ox will shrink from the galling yoke, and prospective bondage is scarcely cheering to a man who values the privilege of freedom from feminine interference. A lingering look around his little office, a sigh which was, perhaps, not altogether unmingled with the

consciousness of just that need which Nellie could supply, and a thrust of his hand through his hair, were indications of growing incredulity in the compensation which was to mete out to him his share of the good things of life. Dr. Maribel leaned back in his arm-chair, his hair looking whiter in contrast with the much worn crimson velvet covering; but his face had already regained its habitual repose, any prolonged annoyance being impossible to his generous nature, which quickly revolted from the threat of a purely selfish idea. Hope is a persistent friend to such a man, and he is apt to lend a willing ear to the sweet tongued messenger. While she whispers to him, dainty feet are tripping up the cussy stairs, they linger a moment on the landing, and then a delicate hand turns the the lock, the door opens, and a beautiful face, warm with blushes and beaming with joy, is close to his. He hears the sweet familiar greeting, "John, dear John!"—he is conscious only of an unutterable joy as he touches those upturned lips quivering with love for him. There was a great deal of compensation in that kiss, but with a sharp and sudden pain the revulsion came. He drew away the tender arms which were clinging to him, and Catherine Featherstone comprehended the whole meaning of his action—the delicate pride which shrank from acceptance, when he had so little, according to his own way of judging, to give in return.

"John," she said, "I thought you would have understood my coming, and the great need for your love and protection which has impelled me to infringe, perhaps, the rules of strict propriety and modesty."

"My darling, my darling!" he cried, "have you come to give your sweet life to a rusty, poor, maimed, and old enough to be your father? O! Kitty, do you ask me to believe this?"

"Yes, John," she answered, looking directly at him. Those meeting eyes read deep in to each other's hearts, and impassioned glances had brought "Two spirits to one equal mind." The woman, with beautiful trust in the man's great heart, has come to him, conscious that in his love she would risk no possible danger. Her innocent and pious life would be safe from suspicion of possible transgression for such is the legacy which wicked mothers leave to their daughters - and her life with John Maribel offered to her constant nature all that she had ever understood of perfect earthly happiness. There was in him a consciousness of power to protect, a strong conviction of what was best for her, an unutterable gratitude for this other dearer life, for the radiant presence which would henceforth illumine his home.

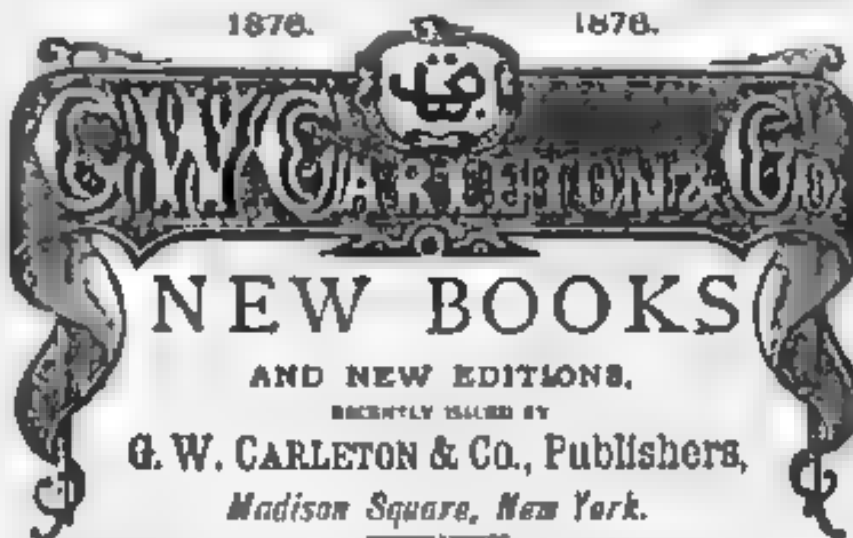
Mr. Featherstone had quietly entered the adjoining room. He came forward now, holding out both hands to John, exclaiming: "God bless you, my dear and faithful

friend! Forgive me, my child," he continued, turning to the blushing girl, "forgive me for having been unfaithful, even in thought, to this noble man whom you have wisely chosen."

THE END.

1876.

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